

A NEW SIMPLIFIED PARAPHRASE

THE EASY ENGLISH

CLEAR

WORD





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THE EASY ENGLISH CLEAR WORD

PARAPHRASED BY
JACK J. BLANCO, TH.D.

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Word of God!

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hear His voice
more clearly
than ever and
know what He
wants for you.

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Jack Blanco, Th.D., is the former dean of the School of Religion of Southern Adventist University. Retired, he resides in Collegedale, Tennessee. *The Easy English Clear Word* is a rewrite of his phenomenally successful paraphrase *The Clear Word*, which has renewed the devotional lives of thousands.

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JACK J. BLANCO, TH.D.

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Preface

This is not a translation of the Bible but a condensed paraphrase for an easier reading of Scripture. It can be used by those who wish to focus on the central thought of a passage quickly, as well as by those who are learning English. Throughout this paraphrase verses have been grouped together to make it easier to understand what the Bible is telling us.

For instance, the long list of ancestors includes only the more familiar names. Also, though we did not skip over any of them, we have shortened some of the details of wars and immoral practices. In the Old Testament we did our best to retain the beauty of the Psalms, the clarity of prophetic predictions, and the concern of God for His people. In the New Testament we were careful to maintain the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels and the insightfulness of the Epistles, particularly those of Paul, and the prophetic nature of the book of Revelation.

We want to thank all those who had a part in making this paraphrase in easy English available to busy people and to you who are learning English. May the God of heaven, who loved us so much that He sent His only begotten Son to come and die for us, bless you as you read His word. To Him be glory and honor forever. Amen.

—Jack Blanco
*Retired Professor and Dean
Southern Adventist University*

Old Testament

Genesis

INTRODUCTION: *The first book of the Bible was written by Moses about 1,500 years before Christ (B.C.). In this book we learn that God created this world in six days and blessed the seventh day. We learn how Adam and Eve were created, how they sinned and had to leave the Garden of Eden. And we learn about Noah and the Flood. This book also tells us the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and what Joseph did to save God's people.*

God Creates Everything

1 In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth. When He first made the earth, He made it out of nothing and set it spinning in space. It had no light and was covered with water. But the Holy Spirit was there watching over it.

3-5. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God looked at the light and was pleased. Then He separated the light from the darkness. He called the light Day and the darkness Night. This happened on the first day.

6-8. Then God said, "Let there be a sky," and there it was. The fog surrounding the earth lifted, and you could see the waters. God called the sky Heaven. This happened on the second day.

9-10. Then God said, "Let the waters come together in different places and let dry land appear," and it did. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters He called oceans.

11-13. Then God said, "Let there be grass, plants, and trees," and that's what happened. Just like that, the whole earth was covered with grass, plants, and trees. And it looked good. This happened on the third day.

14-19. Then God said, "Let there be

two lights in the sky, one for the day and one for the night. Let them shine on the earth." And that's what happened. God spoke, and there were two great lights. He made the stars, too. God put these lights in the sky to shine on the earth to divide the day from the night. This happened on the fourth day.

20-23. Then God said, "Let the waters be full of fish, large and small, and let birds fly in the sky." So God made all kinds of fish and all kinds of birds. And what He saw made Him happy. He blessed the fish and the birds and told them to multiply. This took place on the fifth day.

24-25. Then God said, "Let animals appear on the earth, large and small, and also creeping ones." And that's what happened. God made all of them, and when He saw what He had done, it made Him happy.

26. Then God said to His Son, "Let Us make people who look like Us, and put them in charge of all the animals and fish and birds."

27-30. So God created a man and a woman. He blessed them and said, "Have children and take charge of all the animals and fish and birds. For food I have given you fruit and grains from seed-producing trees and plants.

The animals and birds will eat whatever else the earth produces.”

31. On the sixth day God looked at what He had made, and it looked good. He was very happy.

The Seventh Day

2 So everything was finished, and the earth was beautiful.

2-3. On the seventh day God stopped His work and enjoyed what He had made. Then He blessed the seventh day and made it special, because on that day He rested from His work and enjoyed what He had made.

4. This is the story of how God made the earth and the sky in six days.

5-6. This happened before man had to work to grow his food. In those days it didn't have to rain, because every night God watered the earth with a heavy dew.

The Story of the Garden

7. When God made man, He made him out of clay. He then blew life into man's lungs, and man became a living human being.

8-9. Then God put him in the garden that He had made called Eden. It was full of beautiful trees—fruit trees, shade trees and flowering trees. In the middle of the garden was the tree of life, and not far away, the tree of good and evil. This tree would test man to see if he really loved God.

10-14. A sparkling river flowed through the garden. This river branched into four smaller rivers. One was Pison, another Gihon, still another Tigris, and the fourth one Euphrates.

15-17. When God made man, He told him to take care of the garden. God said, “You may eat the fruit from every tree in the garden, but don't eat the fruit from the tree called good and evil, or you will die.”

18-20. When God and His Son created man, They said to Each Other, “It's not good for man to be by himself. Let's make a suitable companion for him.” But first God brought all the animals and the birds to Adam and asked him to name them. After he had named them all, Adam felt very lonely, because they all had companions, but he didn't.

21-22. So God made Adam fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, He took out one of Adam's ribs. He then used it to create a woman to be Adam's companion.

23. When Adam woke up and saw what God had done, he said, “Now I won't be lonely anymore, because I have a companion. She was created from one of my ribs. So we belong together. I will call her Eve.”

24. That's why men and women get married, because they belong to each other.

25. Adam and Eve didn't have to wear clothes then because God covered them with His own light.

The Beginning of Sin

3 Of all the animals, the serpent was the most intelligent and beautiful. One day when Eve came too close to the tree of good and evil, Satan asked through the serpent, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit in this garden?”

2-3. Eve answered, “We may have fruit from any tree we want except this one. God told us not to eat from it, and not even to touch it, or we'll die.”

4-5. Satan said, “That's not true. You won't die. God doesn't want you to eat from it because you'll become as wise as He is. Then you can decide for yourself what is good and bad.”

6. Instead of running back to her husband, Eve lingered at the tree. The

fruit looked delicious! Then she touched it and nothing happened. So she took a bite. Excited, she ran to tell her husband. From this, Adam knew that Eve would die, so he took the fruit and ate it to die with her.

7-8. Immediately God's light that had covered them disappeared. They were naked and felt ashamed. So they got some large leaves and tried to cover themselves. Then they heard God walking in the garden. They were afraid, so they went and hid.

9-12. But God knew where they were. He called to Adam, "Why are you hiding from Me?" Adam answered, "I heard You coming, and I was afraid." God said, "Did you take fruit from the tree I told you not to?" Adam said, "The woman You gave me made me eat it."

13. God turned to Eve and asked, "Did you do that?" She answered, "The serpent You made is to blame. It made me eat it."

14. God said to the serpent, "Because Satan used you, from now on you'll have to crawl on the ground."

15. "I will put the fear of you and Satan into the heart of the woman and her children. One day a Boy will be born whom Satan will try to kill. But He will defeat Satan just as a father crushes the head of a poisonous snake to protect his family. He will sacrifice His life, but He will save those who love Him."

16. Then God said to Eve, "Because you have sinned, it will be painful for you to have babies. And you will not control your husband, but he will be the head of the house."

17-19. Then God said to Adam, "Because you ate the fruit your wife gave you even though you knew better, you will have to work hard all your life just to feed your family. You will have to grow your own food, but

the soil will produce many weeds. It won't be easy to provide for your family's needs. After you die, your body will return to the ground from which it was made."

20. Adam called his wife Eve, meaning Life, because she would be the first mother of everyone who would live on the earth.

21. After Adam sinned, God took the skins of some animals and made clothes for Adam and Eve.

22-23. Then God said to His Son, "Because Adam and Eve ate of the tree of good and evil, they are not like Us anymore. But if they stay in the garden, they'll keep eating from the tree of life. So We need for them to leave the garden, or they will live forever the way they are."

24. So God sent angels with beams of light that looked like swords to guard the entrance to the garden. Then no one could ever again live there and eat from the tree of life.

Adam's Family

4 Sometime later Eve had a baby boy and called him Cain. She said, "Maybe this is the boy that God promised would save us." Then Eve had another boy. She called him Abel. Cain grew up to be a farmer, and Abel became a shepherd.

3-5. At the end of each week the family worshiped together. Cain would bring an offering from what he grew on the farm. Abel would bring a lamb from his flock. God accepted Abel's offering because he brought what he had been told. But God did not accept Cain's offering, because he didn't bring a lamb as he knew he should. This made Cain angry.

6-7. God said, "Why are you angry? If you would do what I asked you to do, I would accept your offering, too."

When you disobey, you're giving in to sin. With My help you can be stronger than sin."

8. But Cain didn't ask God to help him. Instead he asked his brother to come out to the field to meet him, and when Abel came, Cain killed him.

9-12. Then God asked Cain, "Where is your brother?" Cain retorted, "How should I know? I don't look out for him all the time." God said, "I know you have killed him. From now on the soil you work will never produce as well. Crops will be harder to grow. You will wander from place to place because people will know that you killed your brother. They will be afraid of you."

13-14. Cain protested, "That's not fair. It's too much punishment! If people don't feel safe with me, they will try to kill me for killing my brother."

15. God replied, "If anyone kills you, he will be punished seven times more than you." Then God put a mark on Cain so people would not kill him.

16-17. So Cain left home and settled in another part of the country. Before leaving, he married one of his sisters. In the new place she had a baby boy and called him Enoch. Not long afterward, Cain decided to build a little city for his growing family. He named it Enoch, after his first son.

18. Enoch also had sons and later grandsons and great-grandsons. One of them was named Lamech.

19-24. When Lamech grew up he turned away from God and decided to marry two women instead of just one. One was called Adah and the other Zillah. One day Lamech came home and said to his wives, "Listen to me. I just killed two men, one for hitting me and a younger one for insulting me. If God protected Cain from being killed, He'll protect me, too. So don't worry."

25-26. Adam and Eve had a third son they named Seth. They said, "God gave us a son to take Abel's place. Maybe he's the one who'll defeat Satan and save us." When Seth grew up, he had a son named Enosh. It was about this time that people began to realize how much they needed God.

From Adam to Noah

5 When God created Adam, He made him like Himself. Then He made a woman, brought them together, blessed them, and gave them both the same name.

3-5. Adam was 130 years old when Seth was born. Seth looked like his father. He led the people back to God and taught them how to pray. After Seth was born, Adam lived another 800 years and had many more children. Altogether, Adam lived 930 years.

6-8. Seth was 105 years old when he had his first son and then lived another 807 years. Altogether, Seth lived to be 912.

9-20. Here are the ages of some who followed Seth. Enosh lived to be 905; Kenan, 910; Mahalalel, 895; and Jared, 962.

21-24. In time, Enoch was born, and he had a son named Methuselah. Enoch stayed very close to God. After 365 years he suddenly disappeared. One day as he was talking to God, God decided to take him to heaven.

25-32. Enoch's son Methuselah lived 969 years, the longest of anyone. His son Lamech lived only 777 years. Lamech had a son named Noah. They hoped that he would be the one who would defeat Satan and save them. Noah was 500 years old before he had sons. He had three of them: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Noah and the Ark

6 As time passed, more and more people lived on the earth. The sons of the good people married the daughters of the bad people, and they married as many women as they wanted.

3. When God saw this, He said, "People are worshiping each other's bodies more than Me. They are not listening to Me. I will give them 120 years to change."

4-5. In those days people were giants, twice as big as people today. Many were heroes, known for doing great things. But they also sinned a lot, and many of them became very wicked.

6-7. When God saw this, He was hurt, and His heart was sad. Then God said, "I have to do something about this, or soon there won't be any good people left. As much as it hurts Me, I'll have to put a stop to all this."

8-10. Finally, Noah and his family were the only good people left. God was pleased with Noah because he did what was right. He was a kind, honest man who trusted God with all his heart. His three sons were Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

11-12. By this time the whole world was filled with violence. God saw that people had become really bad and that they refused to change.

13-15. Then God said to Noah, "The time has come for Me to do something. I want you to build a big boat out of the hardest wood you can find. Cover it inside and outside with tar so it won't leak. Make it 450 feet long, seventy-five feet wide, and three stories high.

16-18. "Put a roof on it, but leave space at the top for air to circulate. Put a big door in the side of the boat to reach all three stories. I am going to make it rain. It will rain so much that the whole earth will flood, and

everything on it will be destroyed. I promise to save you and your family, but all of you must get into the ark—you, your wife, your three sons and their wives.

19-21. "I'll send a pair of every kind of animal into the ark with you. They'll come two by two, a male with its female. I'll also send a pair from each kind of wild animal and birds to come into the ark, even from the ones called unclean. You'll have to take enough food into the ark for you and your family and to feed all these animals and birds. They won't eat as much as they usually do, but I'll tell you how much to bring."

22. Noah did everything God told him to do.

The Flood

7 When the ark was finished, God said to Noah, "The 120 years are up, and the people still haven't changed. So bring your family into the ark. You're the only ones left who love Me.

24. "I will send to the ark seven pairs of every clean animal and one pair of every unclean animal. Also I will send you seven pairs of every clean bird and one pair of every unclean bird. Seven days later the rains will come. It will rain for forty days and forty nights."

5-6. Noah and his sons did everything that God told them to do. Noah was 600 years old when he and his family went into the ark.

7-9. After they had moved in, the animals came—big ones, little ones, walking ones, creeping ones, jumping ones, and all kinds of birds. They came, two by two, just as God had said. The people were amazed, but they still made fun of Noah and his family.

10-12. Seven days later it began to rain. It started on the seventeenth

day of the second month when Noah was 600 years old. Heavy rains came down, and huge jets of water shot up out of the ground. This continued for forty days and nights.

13-16. Before it started to rain, the very day that God told Noah to go into the ark, he and his family obeyed. And so did all the animals and birds, a sample of every creature that God had created. After they were all inside, God sent an angel to shut the huge door and make it watertight.

17-20. The rain soon caused a flood. The water picked up the huge boat, and it began to float. The waters rose higher and higher until the whole world was covered with water. Even the mountains were under water. In fact, the waters were twenty-five feet higher than the highest mountain.

21-24. Every creature on earth died except the fish. The only people left alive were Noah, his wife, his three sons and their wives, and the animals in the ark. Even after it stopped raining, the water covered the earth for another 150 days.

Noah Leaves the Boat

8 God did not forget Noah and the animals. After He stopped the rain, He sent a strong wind to blow on the water to dry up some of it. Out of the rest He made oceans.

2-5. So He stopped the rain and the jets of water shooting up out of the ground, and the water started to go down. After five months on the water, the ark settled on a high mountain. Three months after that, the tops of other mountains could be seen.

6-9. Noah waited forty more days, then opened a window and let out a large black bird. It flew back and forth from the ark until it found a place to nest. After that, Noah let out a dove.

The dove found no dry place to land, and so it came back.

10-12. A week later Noah let the dove out again. This time it was gone all day. In the evening it came back with a little green olive leaf in its beak. So Noah knew that the valleys were dry. But he decided to wait one more week and then let the dove out again. This time the dove didn't return.

13-15. Then God sent an angel to open the big door. Noah could see that the ground was drying. But he kept the animals in the ark for two more months to make sure it was dry enough before he let them go. He and his family did not leave the ark until God told them to.

16-17. God said to Noah, "You and your wife, and your three sons and their wives, may now leave the boat. Make sure all the animals and birds are out. I want them to scatter over the earth and multiply."

18-19. So Noah and his family left the ark, and so did all of the animals.

20. The first thing that Noah did when he came out of the ark was to build an altar. He took one of the young animals and one of the young birds from each clean kind and sacrificed them as a thanksgiving offering to God for protecting them.

21-22. God saw how thankful Noah was and said, "Never again will I bring a worldwide flood on the earth. As long as the world lasts, planting and harvesting, summer and winter, and day and night will never stop."

The Rainbow

9 Then God blessed Noah and his sons and said, "Have as large a family as you want. I want to see the world full of people again.

2-4. "Don't worry about the animals. I told them to respect you. I'm putting

you in charge and want you to do all you can for them. Some animals will provide food for you and your families. So from now on you may eat meat as well as vegetables. But I don't want you to eat meat that still has blood in it.

5-6. "I will require the life of anyone who kills someone else or of any animal who kills a person. Anyone who kills somebody else shall be put to death. He is a murderer. All life is sacred, especially human life, because I created people to look like Me.

7. "As I said, have as big a family as you want, so the earth will be full of people again."

8-11. Then God said to Noah and his sons, "I promise you and your children, and all the animals and birds that were with you in the ark, that I will never again bring a worldwide flood on the earth.

12-17. "As a sign of this promise, I will put a rainbow in the sky. It will appear whenever the sun shines on the rain. This will remind people of My promise to never again destroy everything with a flood. The rainbow will be in the clouds for everyone to see." Then to make sure Noah understood, God repeated His promise.

Noah's Family

18-19. The sons of Noah were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham had a son called Canaan, who was the father of the Canaanites. The other two sons also had children, and it was from these three brothers that the whole world was filled with people.

20-21. After Noah settled down, he planted gardens and vineyards. One day he drank some grape juice that had been sitting around for a while and had turned into wine. He got drunk and forgot to put his clothes on.

22-23. When Ham came in and saw his father, he thought it was funny and went and told his brothers. But Shem and Japheth didn't think so. They took a sheet and walked backward into the tent and covered their father without seeing him naked.

24-25. The next day Noah felt better. When he heard what had happened, he said, "The children of Ham's son will be called Canaanites. Many of them will not respect God or man. Eventually they will be overcome by the people of Shem and Japheth.

26-27. "May the Lord bless Shem and his children. From one of them will come the promised Deliverer. May the Lord bless Japheth and extend his land. He will live near his brother Shem and be at peace with him. And the Canaanites will be servants of the children of Shem and Japheth."

28-29. Noah lived another 350 years after the flood. He died when he was 950 years old.

The Beginning of Nations

10 Japheth, Ham, and Shem had many children and grandchildren.

2-5. The people of Japheth lived in such countries as Spain and settled on coastlines and islands. They loved the water and built many ships.

6-7. The people of Ham lived in such countries as Egypt, Ethiopia, and Libya.

8-9. One leader among them was Nimrod. He was a mighty warrior and soon had his own empire. He was not only a mighty warrior but also a fearless hunter. People would say to their young men: "I hope you become as strong as Nimrod."

10-12. The city of Babylon was the capital of Nimrod's empire. Soon Nimrod took over other countries, such as Assyria and its capital, Nineveh.

13-20. Some of the people of Ham who lived in Egypt went to live in other countries. They were known as Philistines, Jebusites, and Amorites. They also lived in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

21-31. Shem lived in Mesopotamia and the countries surrounding that area. They were known as Semites, and they had many tribes.

32. All these people came from Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The Tower of Babel

11 In those days everyone spoke the same language. They had moved east from where the ark had come to rest, and many settled in the land of Shinar, which was also called Babylonia.

3-4. After some time they said, "Let's make bricks and build houses that last. Also let's build a beautiful city with a huge escape tower in case there's another flood. Then people from everywhere will come to see our city, and we'll be famous."

5-7. God came down and looked at what they were building and said to His Son, "If these people succeed in building the city and the tower, they'll become proud and think they can do anything. We need to stop them before they forget who created them. Let's give them different languages so they can't understand each other."

8-9. And that's what happened. Suddenly people started talking different languages and couldn't understand each other. So they had to stop building the city and the tower. That's why the place is called Babel, or Babylon, which means confusion, because that's where the Lord made the people speak different languages. So they scattered and went to live in different parts of the world.

Shem's Family

10-11. Noah's son Shem had his first son when he was 100 years old. After that he had many sons and daughters and lived for another 500 years.

12. His son Arphaxad was thirty-five years old when he had his first son, and Arphaxad lived only 438 years.

13-25. After that people lived shorter and shorter lives. Nahor, Abraham's grandfather, lived only 148 years.

26-28. Nahor had a son called Terah, who was the father of Abram, later called Abraham. Terah had two other sons, Nahor, named after his grandfather, and Haran. They belonged to the tribe of Shem, who was the son of Noah. Haran died before his father, Terah, and was buried in the city of Ur, in Babylonia where he was born.

29-30. About this time Abraham married his half sister Sarai, later called Sarah. But Sarah could not have children.

31-32. Shortly after this God asked Abraham to leave the city of Ur and move to the city of Ur. Abraham's father decided to go with him. So Abraham left the city of Ur with his father, Terah, and his nephew Lot. On their way to Canaan they settled for a while in a little city called Haran. That's where Abraham's father, Terah, died. He was 205 years old.

God's Promise to Abraham

12 God said to Abraham, "I don't want you to settle here. I want you to move to the place I will show you. My plan is to make a great nation from your children, people who will love and obey Me. I will bless them, and through them all others too. Those who help you, I will bless. Those who hurt you, I will punish. I want you and your descendants to be a blessing to the whole world."

4-6. Abraham did what God asked him to do. He left the city of Haran with his nephew Lot and went to the land of Canaan. He was seventy-five years old. They took everything with them, including all their servants and animals. Finally they reached Shechem, where the children of Noah's grandson lived. That's why it was called the land of Canaan.

7. Abraham hesitated about settling there, but God said, "Don't be afraid to live here. This is the land I will give to you and your children. It will always belong to you." Then Abraham took some stones and built an altar to the Lord on the very spot where God had talked to him.

8-9. From Shechem Abraham went on to the hills of Bethel. Here he built another altar to the Lord and worshiped Him. Then he broke camp and traveled south into the area called the Negeb.

10. Not long after that some very dry weather came. Day after day it didn't rain, and the animals couldn't find much to eat. So Abraham decided to move to Egypt.

11-13. As they neared Egypt, Abraham said to Sarah, "You are a very beautiful woman. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'Let's kill her husband; then we can have her for ourselves.' So you need to tell them that you're my sister, not my wife. That's partly true, because you are my half sister. Then they will treat me as your brother."

14-16. That's exactly what happened. When they got to Egypt, the people noticed how beautiful Sarah was. When the king heard about Sarah, he asked his servants to bring her to him. Sarah told the king that Abraham was her brother. Then the king was very kind to Abraham. But

God was not pleased with what Abraham had done.

17. So God withheld His blessings from the king's family and from his servants, and everyone got sick because the king had kept Sarah in the palace.

18-19. So the king asked Abraham to come and see him and said, "Why did you lie to me and tell me that Sarah was your sister? When I was wondering why my family and my servants were all sick, God told me the truth. Now take Sarah and leave my country."

20. The king was still kind and told his servants not to hurt Abraham and Sarah, but to send them away in peace, together with their nephew Lot and all their animals.

Abraham Goes Back to Canaan

13 Abraham left Egypt and went back to southern Canaan. By this time he had many animals and had become very rich. He continued toward Bethel, where he intended to remain. This was also the place where he had built an altar to the Lord and asked Him for protection.

5-7. All this time Lot had been traveling with Abraham. He also had his own flocks and herds. But the place where they were couldn't feed all of the animals. Then their servants began to argue over it and their neighbors noticed.

8-9. Abraham said to Lot, "The only way we can stop this arguing among our servants is to separate our animals. What is happening is not a good witness for God. Let's remain friends, but live in different sections of the land. You pick first. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right. If you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

10-12. Lot saw that the area near the Jordan River was well watered and

had even better pastures than Egypt. So he decided to move there. Abraham moved the other direction. For a while Lot lived in the Jordan Valley, but gradually he moved his tents closer to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. But Abraham kept moving farther and farther away from them.

13. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were very wicked and did not respect or worship the Lord.

14-16. After Lot had moved to Sodom, God said to Abraham, "Come outside your tent and look as far as you can in all directions. I will give you all the land you can see and more. It will belong to you and your family. You will have so many descendants that they will be as hard to count as the specks of dust on the earth."

17-18. Then Abraham moved his family, his servants, and all his animals near the city of Hebron with its large oak trees. There he built another altar to the Lord.

Abraham Rescues Lot

14 About this time there was war between four kings and five kings, which included the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, where Lot lived. The five kings decided to get together in the valley by the Dead Sea. For twelve years the five kings had to pay taxes to the four kings. They decided that was long enough, so they stopped.

5-10. That made the four kings mad, and they went to war. First they defeated some other people living in the area; then they marched against the five. The valley had many hidden pits, and when the soldiers of the five kings were defeated and ran away, many of them fell into these pits. The rest of the troops ran to the hills.

11-12. Then the four kings looted the

cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and took everything they could with them. They also took some of the people, including Lot and his family.

13-14. But one of the men escaped and reported it to Abraham, who was still living near Hebron. He had made friends with the Amorites living nearby. When he heard what had happened, he took 318 of his own men, together with some of the Amorites, and went after the four kings to rescue his nephew Lot.

15-16. He launched a surprise attack, and the enemy troops ran and fled north to the city of Damascus. But Abraham caught up with them. He rescued Lot and all the other people who had been taken captive and took back their possessions.

17-18. When the king of Sodom heard what had happened, he decided to go out and meet Abraham to thank him for rescuing his people. Melchizedek, the king of Salem, welcomed Abraham and his men and fed them. He was not only the king but also the high priest of that city. He always taught his people to worship the true God.

19-20. When he met Abraham, he said, "Bless you, Abraham. You are a true servant of the God of heaven, who overcame your enemies." Then Abraham gave his tithe to Melchizedek.

21. When Abraham and his men reached the city of Sodom, the king there said, "I'm so grateful you brought my people back that I want you to keep everything those kings took from us."

22-24. Abraham replied, "I promised God that if He would help me defeat the four kings, I would not go after them to take what was theirs, but only to rescue my nephew and the others. I didn't take anything from your people either. I don't want any-

one to say that I went to war to get rich. All I took was what I needed to feed my men and the Amorites who were with us."

God's Agreement With Abraham

15 After Abraham went home, God said to him in a vision, "Don't be afraid that the four kings will return to attack you. I will protect you and reward you for serving Me."

2-3. Abraham answered, "The greatest reward a man can have is to live on in the lives of his children. But I still don't have a son. So I've decided that I will adopt my chief servant as my son."

4-5. The Lord responded, "Your chief servant shall not be your son. I promise that you will have a son of your own. Come outside and let Me show you something." Abraham went outside, and God said, "Look up into the sky. Can you count all the stars? Someday that's how many people will belong to your family."

6-7. Abraham believed God. The Lord accepted his faith and said that Abraham was a good man. Then God reminded Abraham, "I'm the one who took you out of Ur in Babylonia, protected you, and brought you safely into Canaan."

8-9. Abraham replied, "Lord, how can I know that the land of Canaan will someday belong to me and my family?" God answered, "I'll make a binding agreement with you in the same way that people here do when they become trusted friends. Go get a calf, a goat, a sheep, a dove, and a young pigeon for a sacrifice."

10. So Abraham brought the animals and sacrificed them to the Lord. He then cut them in half and placed them opposite each other. He put a dove on

one side and a pigeon on the other. Then he promised to always be God's friend and to obey Him.

11-12. He stayed there all day keeping the vultures away, waiting for God to answer. By sunset Abraham was tired, and he fell asleep. He dreamed that he was in a very dark place, and he was terribly afraid.

13-14. Then God said to him, "You will have a son, but the time will come when people will mistreat his descendants. Eventually they will become slaves in another land. This will take place over 400 years. But I will set them free and will bring them back home."

15-16. "You will have a long and peaceful life. This other will not happen until after you die. You cannot have the land of Canaan yet because I want the people who live here to have more time to accept Me as their God."

17. Then Abraham woke up. It was night and very dark. He saw a blazing torch and a burning lamp moving between the animal pieces, burning them up. He knew then that God was promising to be his friend and to take care of him.

18-21. God said to Abraham, "I have made a promise to you the way people here do, so you can understand how deep our friendship is. Someday I will give all this land to you. It will include all the land that now belongs to the Hittites, Amorites, Jebusites, and many others."

Abraham's Mistake

16 Years passed, and Sarah still didn't have any children. Finally she decided that Hagar, her servant, should have a baby for her. She talked to Abraham, and he agreed. Hagar also agreed. So Hagar was to Abraham like a second wife, which God did not approve.

4. Soon Hagar was expecting a baby. That caused her to become very proud, and she refused to do what Sarah told her to do.

5-6. Then Sarah blamed Abraham for causing all the trouble. Abraham said, "Even if Hagar is having a baby as we wanted her to, she is still your servant." Sarah told Hagar what Abraham had said, but she still refused to obey her. Instead, she ran away.

7-10. But God's angel knew where she was and asked her, "Where are you going?" She answered, "I'm running away from my mistress, Sarah, and am going home to Egypt." The angel said, "Don't do that. You'll die before you get there. Go back to Sarah and do what she asks you to do. She will be good to you. And don't worry, I will bless your baby."

11-12. "It will be a boy. I want you to call him Ishmael, which means God Answers Prayer. He will grow up to be strong and well able to defend himself. He will have lots of children and grandchildren, and they'll all live in this same general area."

13-15. Hagar didn't know the angel's name, so she called him, The One Who Sees Me. So the well where the angel found her is also called by that name. Hagar then went back to Sarah, and soon the baby was born. She named him Ishmael, as the angel told her to.

16. Abraham was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born. God forgave him for taking Hagar as a second wife.

God Gives Sarah a Son

17 When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, God said to him, "If you continue to obey Me, I will carry out the promise I made with you and will give you and Sarah your very own son." Abraham

fell on his knees, bowed to the Lord, and told Him that he loved Him.

4-7. God replied, "You will be called the father of many people. That's why I have changed your name from Abram to Abraham. Whole nations will claim you as their spiritual father. And I will make the same agreement with them that I have made with you."

8-9. "The land of Canaan will belong to your descendants, and I will be their God. Someday the whole earth will be theirs. But you and your descendants must keep this agreement."

10-14. "As a sign that you and your people belong to Me, I want all men and boys to be circumcised." Abraham did what the Lord told him to do, and circumcision became a rule for many generations.

15-16. Then God said, "I have also changed your wife's name from Sarai to Sarah, which means Princess. I will bless her, and she will have a baby boy. And because of him, many will claim her as their spiritual mother, even princes and kings."

17-18. When Abraham heard this, he thought to himself, "How can this be? I'm almost 100 years old, and Sarah is ninety." Then he said to God, "I already have a boy, Ishmael. Why do I have to have another one?"

19-21. God said, "I want Sarah to have a baby. She's your real wife. I want you to call him Isaac, which means Laughter and Joy. I will make My covenant with him and with his children. I will bless Ishmael, too. He'll become the father of many people, including twelve great rulers. But the covenant promise will belong to Isaac. He will be born about this time next year."

22-23. Abraham carefully listened to what God had to say and stayed on his knees with his head bowed until God

finished. That same day Abraham was circumcised and asked every man and boy to obey God in the same way.

24-27. At this time Abraham was more than ninety-nine years old, and Ishmael was thirteen. No matter what their age, all the men and boys obeyed God and were circumcised.

God Visits Abraham and Sarah

18 About three months later God came to see them. Abraham was sitting in front of his tent.

As he looked up, he saw three men coming toward him. So he went to welcome them. He bowed and asked, "Won't you stay and rest awhile?"

4-5. "Let me get you some water to drink and to wash your feet. You sit and rest in the shade of these trees. You must be hungry. Let me get you something to eat as well. Then you can be on your way. I would be honored to have you as my guests." They answered, "Thank you. We'll be glad to stop and rest awhile."

6-7. Abraham hurried back to the tent, told Sarah about the men, and asked her to bake some fresh bread for their three visitors. Next, he hurried to his servants and asked them to kill a small calf and roast some meat for the men.

8-9. He returned to make sure his guests were comfortable and talked with them. Before long, the food was ready. Abraham offered them butter for their bread and all the milk they wanted to drink. When they finished eating, they asked, "Where is Sarah?" Abraham answered, "In the tent."

10-12. Then one of them said, "In nine months I'll be back. By then Sarah will have her baby." Sarah overheard it and quietly laughed. She said to herself, "How can old people like us have a baby?"

13-14. By now Abraham knew that the one who had spoken was the Lord and that the other two were angels, all disguised as men. The Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and think that she was too old to have a baby? Nothing is too hard for God. Nine months from now she will have a baby, just as I said she would."

15. When the visitors stood up to leave, Sarah came out to say goodbye. She said, "I didn't laugh." The Lord replied, "Yes, you did."

Abraham Prays for Lot

16. Abraham walked a little way with the visitors, and on a nearby hill they stopped to say goodbye to him. In the distance they could see the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

17-18. The Lord said to the two angels, "Should I tell Abraham why we came? After all, Abraham is My friend. And I promised that I would make him the spiritual father of many people who will be a blessing to the whole world."

19. "I know he will be an example to his children and his servants. He teaches them to obey Me and to do what is right. They will follow his example. That's why I can bless them the same way I bless Abraham. Yes, I think I'll tell him why we've come."

20-21. The Lord said to Abraham, "We've heard about the terrible things going on in Sodom and Gomorrah. So we came to see for ourselves."

22. Then the Lord told the two angels to go on ahead while He talked with Abraham.

23-26. Abraham asked, "Lord, You're not going to destroy these two cities, are You? Suppose there are fifty good people there. You wouldn't destroy them, would You? That's not like You. Why should good people be punished with bad people?" The Lord answered,

"If there are fifty good people in those cities, I will not destroy them."

27-29. Abraham said, "Forgive me, Lord. But what if there are only forty-five good people in those cities? Would You destroy them?" The Lord answered, "No." Abraham asked, "What if there are forty good people there?" The Lord answered, "For their sake I would not destroy those cities."

30-31. Abraham said, "Lord, please be patient with me. What if there are thirty good people there?" Again the Lord answered, "No." Abraham said, "Lord, please forgive me for continuing to ask. But what if there are twenty good people there?" The Lord answered and again said, "No."

32. Abraham asked one last time, "Lord, how about if there are only ten such people?" The Lord answered, "If I found ten good people in those two cities, I would not destroy them."

33. Abraham stopped asking because he thought of Lot and his family living there. Then the Lord said goodbye and left, and Abraham went back to his tent.

Sodom and Gomorrah Destroyed

19 It was almost sunset when the two angels got to Sodom. Lot happened to be by the city gate. When he saw the two men, he went to meet them and said, "Welcome to Sodom. Please come to my house and spend the night. Tomorrow morning you can go on your way." The men said, "Thank you, but we'll find a place to stay in town."

3-4. But Lot insisted because he knew it wasn't safe to be out at night. So they agreed. When they got to his house, Lot asked his servants to get them something to eat. After they finished eating, there was a knock on the

door. Some men from the city were there to invite the visitors to come to a neighborhood party.

5-8. They said to Lot, "Bring your guests and come with us, and we'll all have a good time." Lot stepped outside, closed the door behind him, and said, "These men are my guests. They've come a long way and are tired. Don't insist that they go."

9. The men said, "Get out of our way. We're coming in and taking your guests with us whether they want to go or not."

10-11. Then the two angels went to the door, pulled Lot inside, and temporarily blinded the men until they finally found their way home.

Lot and His Family Saved

12-13. The angels said to Lot, "Do you have sons or daughters in the city besides your two daughters still living at home? If so, you need to go and tell them to leave now, because we've come to destroy the city."

14. So Lot went to see each of his children and their families. He said, "Quick, go to my house! Two angels are there waiting to take us out of the city. At sunrise they're going to destroy this place." But his sons and daughters wouldn't listen to him.

15. Lot spent almost all night urging his children and their families to leave. But just before dawn, he returned home alone. The angels said, "Quick, take your wife and two daughters and follow us. At sunrise we will destroy the city."

16-17. Lot didn't want to go without the rest of his family, but the angels took him, his wife, and his two daughters by the hand and led them out of Sodom. When they got to the edge of town, the angels said, "Go! Run for your lives! Don't stop or even look

back! Keep on going until you get to the top of those hills!"

18-20. Lot begged, "Please don't make us go up into those hills. It's hard to live in the mountains. Besides, it's too far. We can't make it there in time. Why can't we go to that little village over there instead?"

21-22. The angels replied, "All right, we'll let you go there. That village is also wicked, but for your sake we won't destroy it. Hurry, because we can't do anything until we know that you're safe."

23-25. The sun was just coming up when Lot and his family reached the little village. Suddenly the sky was filled with fire! Flames and hot coals rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah, and both cities burned to the ground. Everything in that valley was destroyed—houses, people, animals, and the crops in the field.

26. Lot's wife did not want to leave the city. Her heart was still there. So as they left, she looked back, and instantly she turned into a pillar of salt.

27-29. Early the next morning Abraham went to the top of the hill where the day before he had said goodbye to the angels. As he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, he could see the whole valley burning. But the Lord had answered his prayer and saved Lot and his daughters.

30. After Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, Lot was afraid to stay in the little town because it, too, was very wicked. So he took his two daughters and went up into the hills and found a cave to live in.

31-38. While they were there, each of the girls had a baby. The older daughter called her baby Moab. And the younger daughter called hers Ammon. These two boys became the fathers of the Moabite and the Ammonite people.

Abraham Moves South

20 Then Abraham moved south and settled in the valley near the city of Gerar. While there, the king's men asked him if Sarah was his wife. Abraham said, "She's my sister." So the king sent for Sarah.

3-5. That night God spoke to the king in a dream and said, "Sarah is Abraham's wife. If you touch her, I'll have to punish you." The king said, "Lord, no one has touched her, and we won't. I brought her to my palace because she said that she was his sister. We didn't know she was his wife."

6-7. God said, "I know you didn't realize she was his wife. That's why I warned you. I'm not holding you guilty. Abraham is My servant. So send Sarah back, and he will pray for you to get well. If you don't send her back, you won't get well, and you will die."

8-10. First thing in the morning the king called his servants and told them what God had said. All of them were afraid. Then he sent for Abraham and demanded, "What have you done to me, my family, and my servants? What made you do such a thing to us? Why did you say she was your sister?"

11-13. Abraham answered, "I didn't think anyone here respected God. I thought that you might kill me so you could have Sarah. That's why I said she was my sister. She is my half sister, but she is also my wife. When we left our country, I said to her, 'You're very beautiful, so tell people you're my sister so they won't kill me to get you for a wife.' And she agreed."

14-16. Then the king gave Sarah back to Abraham and also gave him sheep, oxen, and servants as farewell presents. He promised, "In addition to these presents, I'll let you stay in my country and live wherever you choose." And to Sarah he said, "I'm

giving your husband 1,000 pieces of silver to keep for you. This is to remind you that I am innocent and did not touch you."

17-18. Then Abraham prayed for the king and asked the Lord to heal him, his family, and his servants so they could have children again. God answered Abraham's prayer and healed all of them.

Sarah Has a Baby

21 The time came for Sarah to have a baby, just as God had promised. It was a boy, as He had said it would be. Abraham named him Isaac, which means Laughter. When Isaac was eight days old, he was circumcised. His parents dedicated him to the Lord.

5-7. Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. Sarah was so happy to have a baby of her own. She thanked God and said, "The Lord has made me happy, and those who hear about it will be happy too. Who would have thought that at my age I could have a baby?"

Isaac and Ishmael

8. When Isaac was about three years old, Abraham had a big celebration because he was no longer a baby, but a boy.

9-10. One day Sarah overheard Ishmael teasing Isaac, telling him that someday he, Ishmael, would be in charge of everything because he was born first. Sarah said to Abraham, "You need to send Ishmael and his mother away because he thinks he's more important than Isaac and that he will inherit all your wealth."

11. Abraham was really hurt over this and didn't know what to do, because he loved both boys.

12-13. Then God said to Abraham, "I

know how much you love Ishmael, and so do I. But Sarah is right. To have peace in the family, you need to send Ishmael and his mother away. Don't worry. I'll watch over them and bless them. He'll become the father of a great people, because he, too, is your son."

14. The next day Abraham talked to Ishmael and his mother and told them what God had said. She understood and decided to do what God wanted her to do. So they left, and wandered in the wilderness.

15-16. Soon they ran out of water. She placed Ishmael under a shrub. Then she walked a little way and went behind a large bush and said to herself, "I can't bear to watch the boy die." Then she started to cry.

17-18. God heard Ishmael crying and sent an angel to talk to Hagar. "Don't worry," the angel said, "God loves you and your son and has asked me to come and help you. Let me show you where water is. Then go back to your son and remind him that God loves him. Tell him that he will become the father of a great people."

19-20. When Hagar looked in the direction the angel was pointing, she saw a spring. She ran to fill her jug, and they both had plenty of water. God did take care of them. They decided to settle in the desert near Egypt.

21. When it was time for Ishmael to get married, they went to Egypt to find him a wife, but they returned to the desert to live.

Abraham and the King

22-23. About this time the king took his army commander and went to see Abraham. They said, "We know that God loves you and is with you. Promise God that you will not tell us half-truths as you did before. We were

kind to you and your people. So we want you to also promise God that you will be kind to us."

24-26. Abraham replied, "I promise God that I will tell you the whole truth and that I will be kind to you and your people as you were to me and my people." They talked a while; then Abraham told the king that his servants had taken over a well that Abraham's men had dug. The king said, "I didn't know about this. I'll take care of it right away."

27-30. Then Abraham gave the king sheep and cattle as a sign of their agreement. He also gave the king seven little lambs. The king asked, "What are these lambs for?" Abraham answered, "These are a present for helping to solve the problem of the well."

31-32. The king accepted the seven little lambs and called the well where they were sitting the Well of Agreement. Then the king and his commander went back home.

33-34. After that, Abraham planted some trees around the well and thanked the Lord for His protection: Abraham liked where he lived and stayed there for a long time.

Abraham's Faith

22 When Isaac was a strong young teenager, God decided to test Abraham to see how much he really loved Him. One night He called to Abraham, and Abraham answered, "Yes, Lord, I'm listening."

2. God said, "I want you to take your son Isaac, whom you love very much, and go to the mountain called Moriah. It will take about three days. When you get there, I want you to sacrifice him to Me."

3. Abraham couldn't believe what he had heard, but even though he didn't understand, he did as he was told. He

woke up two servants and told them to get two donkeys ready. Then he woke up Isaac, and before the sun came up, they were on their way.

4-6. Three days later they came to the place God wanted them to go. Abraham said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkeys while Isaac and I go up the mountain to worship." Isaac took the wood they had brought, and Abraham took a knife and a container with hot coals to make a fire.

7-8. As they made their way up the mountain, Isaac said, "Father, we have the wood and the hot coals, but where is the lamb?" Abraham answered, "God will provide the lamb." So the two of them quietly walked together until they reached the top.

9. They took some large stones, made an altar, and put the wood on it. Then Abraham told Isaac that God wanted him to be the sacrifice. Isaac was surprised, but he told his father that he was willing to die for God, if that's what He wanted. Then Isaac climbed on the altar, and Abraham bound his hands with a rope.

10-12. Abraham cried and with his knife was ready to sacrifice Isaac, when God called out, "Abraham!" Abraham answered, "Yes, Lord, here I am." The Lord said, "Stop! Don't touch the boy! I was just testing you to see how much you really loved Me."

13-14. When Abraham heard that, he cried for joy. Then he saw a ram caught in some bushes. He sacrificed it in place of his son. After that people called the place The Mountain Where God Provided.

15-18. Then God said to Abraham, "I will bless you because you were willing to give up your son, no matter how painful it was to you. I will multiply your descendants, and someday

there will be so many of them that they will be as hard to count as the stars in the sky. One of your descendants will be My Son because you have obeyed Me. He will be a blessing to the whole world."

19. Then Abraham and Isaac went back down the mountain. Together with the two servants they returned home.

20-24. Abraham learned that his brother Nahor, who was still living in the land of Babylonia, had many children, including eight boys. One of them had a daughter named Rebecca, who later became Isaac's wife.

Sarah Dies

23 Sarah lived thirty-seven years after Isaac was born. She was 127 years old when she died. Abraham cried. He decided to bury her by the big oak trees where they used to live. He went to the people who owned the land and said, "My wife has just died. Please let me buy a piece of property so I can bury her."

5-9. The people answered, "Pick out a spot and bury her. No one will stop you." Abraham thanked them, but replied, "I want to buy a piece of property that I know is my own. The property I like belongs to Ephron. It has a cave on it which would make a good place to bury my wife. I'll be glad to pay whatever he asks for it."

10-13. Ephron spoke up, "I'll give you the property, including the cave. I'm saying this in front of those who are here so they'll know that it's now yours." Abraham thanked him, but protested, "I want to pay for it as my last gift to Sarah."

14-16. Ephron replied, "The land is worth 400 pieces of silver, but I would like to give it to you." Abraham counted out 400 pieces of silver, in-

sisting on paying for the property. Ephron accepted it.

17-18. So now the property with the cave belonged to Abraham. And all the people agreed to it.

19-20. Then Abraham buried Sarah in the cave by the big oaks, because the field and cave were his.

Isaac Finds a Wife

24 God blessed Abraham in all that he did.

2-4. One day Abraham called in his chief servant. He said, "I need your help. I want you to promise me and God that you will make sure Isaac does not marry a local woman. I want you to go back to where I came from and find a wife for Isaac."

5-8. His servant replied, "What if I go back to your people and find the right woman, but she refuses to come? Do you want Isaac to go and live there?" Abraham answered, "No, I do not want Isaac to live there. God told me to move here. So I believe He will help you find the right woman, and she will be willing to come. But if she doesn't, you'll be free from your promise."

9-10. So Abraham's servant promised to do his best to find the right woman for Isaac. Then he got things ready for the long trip back to where Abraham had been born. He loaded ten camels with food and gifts and, together with other servants, left for the land of Babylon.

11. When he got there, he stopped by a well just outside the city to water his camels. It was late in the afternoon, and soon the women would come to get water for the family.

12-14. Abraham's servant prayed, "Lord, please help me keep the promise I made to Abraham. I'm here at this well waiting for the young women of the city to come for water. I'll ask them to give me a drink. The

one who says, 'I'll be happy to get you a drink, and I'll even water your camels,' may this be the woman You want for Isaac."

15-16. He had hardly finished praying when Rebecca came to draw water from the well. She was very pretty. She walked down the steps of the well and filled her large jar with water and came back up.

17-20. Abraham's servant asked, "Please, may I have a drink?" She replied, "I'll be happy to give you a drink, and I'll even water your camels for you. They look thirsty." She emptied her large jar into the feeding trough and went back down the steps to get water again and again until the camels had enough.

21-22. Abraham's servant was amazed because it took many trips to water ten thirsty camels. Now he was sure this was the woman the Lord had chosen to be Isaac's wife. When she finished, he thanked her and gave her some gifts for her kindness.

23-25. Then he asked what her name was. She replied, "Rebecca." He asked, "What is your father's name? Do you think I could stay at your parents' house tonight?" She said, "Thank you for the gifts. I'm the daughter of Bethuel, and my grandfather is Nahor. I'm sure my parents would be glad to have you. We have lots of room, and our barn is full of food for your camels."

26-27. Then Abraham's servant looked up to heaven and prayed, "Thank You, Lord, for helping me find Abraham's relatives. This woman's grandfather is Abraham's brother. How kind You are to help me keep my promise!"

28-29. When Rebecca heard that, she ran home and told her mother and brothers all that had happened. Then Rebecca's brother, Laban, ran to wel-

come Abraham's servant, who was still at the well.

30-31. He said to the servant, "I am so glad to meet you. Come to our house. There's room for you and your men and food in the barn for your camels."

32-33. So Abraham's servant and his servants followed Laban. When they arrived, they unloaded the camels, fed them, and went into the house. Then Laban asked his servants to bring some food for the men. But Abraham's servant requested, "Before we eat, may I tell you why we've come." Laban replied, "Tell us."

34-35. The man said, "I'm Abraham's servant. The Lord has blessed Abraham. He has huge flocks of sheep and large herds of cattle, plus lots of donkeys and camels.

36. "His wife, Sarah, had a baby when she was ninety years old. It was a miracle. They named him Isaac. He's now grown and is in charge of everything Abraham owns.

37-41. "The other day Abraham asked me to promise that I would not let Isaac marry a woman from where he lives, but only someone from his own people. I asked, 'What if I find a woman and she doesn't want to come?' He said, 'The Lord will help you find the right one. If the family refuses to let her come, or if she doesn't want to come, then you're free from your promise.'

42-44. "So when I got here, I stopped at the city well and prayed, 'Lord, please help me find Abraham's relatives and the right woman for Isaac. When the women come to draw water from the well, I will ask them for a drink of water. The one who offers me a drink and also offers to water my camels, let her be the one you want for Isaac.'

45-46. "I had hardly finished praying when Rebecca came with a large jar

on her shoulder. She went down the steps of the well to draw water, and when she came up I asked for a drink of water. She responded, 'I'll be happy to give you a drink, and I'll also water your camels. They look thirsty.' So she kept going back and forth until all the camels were watered.

47-48. "When she finished, I gave her some gifts and asked what her name was. She replied, 'Rebecca. I'm the daughter of Bethuel, and my grandfather is Nahor.' As soon as I heard that, I knew the Lord had answered my prayer. Then I prayed, 'Lord, thank You for helping me find Abraham's people and a wife for Isaac.'

49. "This is the reason we've come. So please let me know how you feel about Rebecca becoming Isaac's wife. This is more important to me than food."

50-52. Then Rebecca's family said, "This is the Lord's doing! How can we say no?" When Abraham's servant heard that, he fell on his knees and thanked the Lord for what He had done.

53-54. Then he opened more presents and gave Rebecca beautiful clothes, gold, and silver. He also had presents for her parents and brothers. Only after Abraham's servant gave presents to everyone did he and his men eat. By the next morning Abraham's servant was ready to go back home.

55-56. But Rebecca's family said, "Let's wait a week or so. Then she may leave." Abraham's servant said, "Don't ask me to stay any longer. The Lord has been so good to me; I'm eager to get home."

57-58. They said, "Let's ask Rebecca." So they called her and said, "Do you want to wait a week, or do you want to go with Abraham's servant today?" She said, "I'm willing to go today."

59-61. So her parents gave their permission, and Abraham's servant's

men began loading the camels. Before they left, Rebecca's parents blessed her and said, "The Lord be with you, Rebecca, and make you the mother of a great people." So Rebecca and her servant girl got on the camels and left with Abraham's servant and his men for the land of Canaan to meet Isaac.

62-63. Back home Isaac was taking care of the sheep and cattle. Sometimes he would be gone for days. Now, it so happened that he had just come home from the field late in the afternoon and decided to find a quiet place to pray.

64-65. Abraham's servant told Rebecca that they were nearing Abraham's camp. As she looked ahead, she saw someone slowly walking in the field. Thinking it might be Isaac, she asked the servant to stop the camels, and got off. Then she asked the servant, "Could that be Isaac?" He answered, "Yes, it is." Then she covered her face with a veil, as brides were expected to.

66-67. When they got there, Abraham's servant introduced Rebecca to Isaac and told him everything that happened. Isaac was so happy. He led the camels back to his tent and introduced Rebecca to his father. When Abraham heard what had happened, he knew that his prayers had been answered. Then Isaac and Rebecca got married, and he loved her very much.

Abraham's Final Years

25 After Sarah died, Abraham was very lonely. So he decided to marry again.

2-6. He had more children, six of whom were boys. When they grew up, they also married and had families. Abraham put Isaac in charge of everything, but he did not forget his other sons. He gave them many gifts

and asked them to live in another part of the country, because this part belonged to Isaac.

7-8. Abraham was 175 years old when he died. Even back then, this was considered to be a long life.

9-10. Then Isaac and Ishmael buried their father in the cave by the big trees where Sarah had been buried.

11. After Abraham's death, everything he owned belonged to Isaac.

Ishmael and Isaac's Family

12-18. Ishmael, the son of Hagar, had married and had many children. When his boys grew up, they became leaders of twelve tribes. Many cities and towns are named after them. Ishmael lived to be 137 years old. When he died, relatives from everywhere came to his funeral.

19-22. Isaac, the son of Sarah, was forty years old when he married Rebecca. At first Rebecca couldn't have children. So they prayed about it, and she became pregnant. After a few months Rebecca prayed, "Lord, what's happening to me?"

23. The Lord answered, "You will have two baby boys. They will grow up with different interests. They will each get married and have many children, and as time goes on, they will become two small nations. But the younger will be stronger than the other."

24-26. When Rebecca had her babies, they were twin boys, just as the Lord had said. The first boy they named Esau, and the second they named Jacob.

27-28. As the boys grew, the parents could see their different interests. Esau liked to hunt, but Jacob liked to take care of sheep. It wasn't long before Isaac favored Esau, and Rebecca favored Jacob.

29-31. One day Jacob was sitting outside his tent cooking some red lentils

with onions and garlic. About that time Esau came in from hunting, tired and very hungry. When he smelled the lentils, he said to Jacob, "I haven't eaten all day. I'm about to die! Let me have some of that!" Jacob replied, "Sure, on one condition. That you let me be the priest of the family."

32-33. Esau said, "What good is being a priest of the family if you're hungry? If you want to be the priest, go ahead. Just give me some of those lentils." Jacob said, "Wait! Don't say it like that. Take an oath so I know you mean it." And that's what Esau did.

34. Then Jacob gave Esau all the lentils and bread he could eat. Esau wasn't concerned about what he had just promised, because he didn't think much about being the family priest. So he thanked Jacob and left.

Isaac and the King

26 Because it had not rained for some time, Isaac decided to move into the neighboring territory controlled by the king of the Philistines.

2-3. The Lord said to Isaac, "I don't want you to go on to Egypt. Stay here, and I will tell you when to move. I'll watch over you and bless you. This is the land I promised your father Abraham."

4-6. "I will be with your children and grandchildren. This land will belong to them, and they will be a blessing to many nations. This is the promise I made to Abraham because he listened to Me and did whatever I asked him to do." So Isaac stayed there, as God had said.

7. The people asked him if Rebecca was his wife. He told them that she was his sister. He said this because he was afraid they would kill him so they

could have Rebecca, because she was very beautiful.

8-9. One day the young king looked out the window and saw Isaac kissing Rebecca. So he called for Isaac. "Why did you tell us that Rebecca was your sister when she's your wife?" Isaac answered, "I was afraid that someone would kill me to get Rebecca!"

10-11. The king replied, "But by telling us she's your sister, one of the men could have taken her to be his wife, and God would hold us guilty and punish us for it." So the king warned his people not to mistreat Isaac or Rebecca. Anyone who did would be killed. And the people obeyed.

12-14. Then Isaac asked the Lord to forgive him, and He did. That same year Isaac planted crops, and the Lord gave him a great harvest. Before long he became one of the richest men in the area. He also had huge flocks of sheep, large herds of cattle, and many servants. Soon the people who lived there became jealous.

15-16. So they began to fill with dirt the wells that Abraham's servants had dug. When Isaac complained, the king said, "I think you had better move away from here, because you are getting too rich."

17-21. So Isaac moved to another part of the country. He dug again the wells that Abraham's servants had dug, which the Philistines had filled with dirt. Isaac's servants also dug a new well. But the people said the new well belonged to them because they had lived there before Isaac. So Isaac's servants dug another well, and the same thing happened.

22. Then Isaac told his servants to dig a well away from there, and finally everyone was happy. Isaac said, "Thank You, Lord, for space to feed our sheep and cattle. Now there'll be peace

and no more arguments over wells."

23-24. After this, Isaac went to a new area to look over the land. That night the Lord said to Isaac in a dream, "Don't be afraid. I am here to protect you and bless you just as I promised to bless your father Abraham."

25. So Isaac built an altar and worshiped the Lord. Then he moved his family and all his sheep and cattle to that part of the land.

26-27. Not long afterward, the king of the Philistines and his commander came to see Isaac. Isaac was surprised and asked, "Why have you come to see me? You were the ones who asked me to leave your area."

28-29. They said, "We know that the Lord is with you and is blessing you. We have come to make an agreement with you. We did not hurt you, so we want you to promise that you will not hurt us. We will continue to be kind to you."

30-31. Isaac thought that was a good idea. So he asked his servants to prepare a big meal to celebrate the agreement. Early the next morning Isaac and the king signed the agreement and became friends. Then the king and his commander went back home.

32-33. That same day Isaac's servants told him that they had dug another well and found more water. So Isaac called the place Sheba. That's how the city of Beersheba got its name.

34-35. When Isaac's son Esau decided to get married, he didn't go to his own people to find a wife, but married two women who lived nearby. They gave Isaac and Rebecca no end of troubles.

Isaac Blesses Jacob

27 In his old age Isaac was almost blind. One day he called for Esau. When Esau came, Isaac said, "Come, sit down. I

want to talk to you." Esau answered, "Yes, Father."

2-4. Isaac said, "I'm old and don't have much longer to live. Why don't you hunt for a deer and roast the meat for me the way I like it? Then you and I can eat it together. I want to bless you and put you in charge of everything I own, because you're my firstborn."

5-7. Rebecca overheard Isaac. She saw Esau take his bow and arrows and leave. Quickly she called Jacob and whispered, "I just heard your father talking to Esau, telling him to hunt a deer and roast some of the meat for him. Your father will then bless your brother and put him in charge of everything because he's the firstborn."

8-10. "God promised that you would be the priest of the family and also be in charge of everything. So do what I tell you. Go and get two young goats. I will prepare them just the way your father likes them, and he won't know the difference. The two of you can eat together. Then he will bless you and put you in charge of everything."

11-13. "But, Mother," Jacob protested, "Esau is a hairy man, and my skin is smooth. When my father hugs me, he'll know I'm not Esau." Rebecca replied, "If it doesn't work, I'll take the blame. Now do as I say and go and get two young goats."

14-17. Jacob did what his mother said, and Rebecca cooked the food just the way Isaac liked it. Then she got some of Esau's best clothes for Jacob. She put some goatskin on his arms and neck. Then she gave him the food and told him to take it to his father.

18-19. "Father?" Jacob said quietly. "Speak up, son; I can hardly hear you," Isaac said. "Are you Jacob or Esau?" Jacob answered, "I am Esau. I have your favorite meat, just as you

asked. Sit up and we can eat together. Then you can bless me, as you said you would."

20-22. Isaac sat up and asked, "How did you find a deer so fast?" Jacob answered, "God helped me." Isaac wanted to make sure it was Esau. He said, "Come close to me so I can hug you." Jacob came closer. His father hugged him, smelled his clothes, felt his arms, and said, "You sound like Jacob, but you feel like Esau."

23-25. Isaac couldn't tell the difference, so he asked again, "Tell me honestly, my son, are you really Esau?" Jacob answered, "Yes, Father, I am." Isaac believed Jacob and said, "Now let's eat together. Then I will bless you and put you in charge of everything." So Jacob and his father ate together.

26-27. When they had finished, Isaac said, "Come close to me, my son, and hug me." Jacob hugged his father and again Isaac smelled Jacob's clothes and felt his arms to make doubly sure it was Esau. Then he said, "God bless you, my son. You have the smell of the open field that I love."

28-29. "May God give you all the rain you need to keep your fields green, and may He give you big harvests of grapes and wheat. May you have many servants. May people respect you and may your brother listen to you and accept you as being in charge. Blessings on everyone who blesses you, and may those who hate you be hated by others. All I have is now yours."

30-31. Jacob thanked his father, hugged him, and left. A little later Esau came back from hunting. He had found a deer and skinned it, then roasted it just the way his father liked it. He took it to Isaac and said, "Father, sit up. I have the roast you like. Now we can eat together, and you can bless

me and put me in charge of everything, as you said you would."

32-33. Jacob sat up in bed and said, "Are you Esau?" Esau answered, "Yes, Father, of course I am." Then Isaac's whole body began to shake. He could hardly talk. "Who just brought me the food I wanted? I ate it and blessed him. Then I put him in charge of everything. And there's nothing I can do to change it."

34-35. When Esau heard this, he cried bitterly and said, "Please, give me some kind of blessing." Isaac said, "It must have been Jacob who came to see me, because it sounded like him. And I blessed him and put him in charge of everything."

36. Esau protested, "First, Jacob tricked me into giving him the privilege of being priest of the family. Now he's tricked his own father into giving him everything he owns. Isn't there some blessing left for me?"

37. Isaac said, "Listen, my son. Jacob is now in charge. Everything belongs to him—servants, flocks, herds, and harvests. I have nothing left to give you unless he says so."

38. With tears in his eyes, Esau begged, "Please, there must be some blessing that you can give me, Father."

39-40. Isaac put his hand on Esau's head and said, "Yes, my son, there is. May God bless you. Your future will not depend on rain and harvests. It will lie in your skill as a hunter and in your use of the sword. The time will come when you will be independent and free from your brother. I will continue to ask God to bless you, and He will."

41-45. From then on, Esau hated his brother. He decided that after Isaac died he would kill Jacob. He started telling that to some of the servants. When Rebecca heard it, she said to Jacob, "Esau is planning to kill you

for what you did, so you must leave. Go to your uncle Laban in Mesopotamia. When your brother gets over it, I'll let you know and you can come back home."

46. Then Rebecca said to Isaac, "The women here are after Jacob to marry them. If that happens, I'll die. Let me send him to my brother, Laban, so he can find a wife for you there."

Jacob Leaves Home

28 Isaac agreed that it was a good idea to send Jacob to Laban to find a wife. So he called for Jacob and told him not to marry one of the local women, but to go to his uncle Laban in Mesopotamia to find a wife.

3-5. Then Isaac forgave Jacob. He prayed, "Lord, please watch over Jacob and give him a safe trip. May he find the woman that You want him to marry. And may they have a large family. Someday, may he own the land that You promised his grandfather Abraham." Isaac and Jacob hugged each other. Then Jacob left for Mesopotamia.

6-9. When Esau heard that his parents had sent Jacob to Uncle Laban so he wouldn't marry a local woman, he realized that they didn't like that he had married two local women. This made Esau doubly mad. So he went to visit his uncle Ishmael and also married one of his daughters.

10-11. In the meantime, Jacob was on his way to see Uncle Laban. After walking all day, he was very tired. Before dark he found a place to rest. He picked out a flat rock for a pillow and soon was sound asleep.

12-13. That night he had a dream. He saw stairs going all the way to heaven. Angels were walking up and down on them. At the top of the stairs

stood the Lord. He said to Jacob, "I am the God who promised this land to your grandfather Abraham and to your father, Isaac. Someday it will belong to you.

14-15. "I will bless you with a large family. You will have so many descendants that they will be as hard to count as specks of dust on the earth. You will be a blessing to people in many countries. I will go with you and bring you back here safely. I will not leave you. I will keep My promise, the same promise I made to your father and grandfather."

16-17. Then Jacob woke up. "I didn't know that the Lord was here! This place is holy! It's like a gate into heaven!"

18-19. The rest of the night, he couldn't sleep. First thing in the morning, he took some stones and built an altar. On top, he put the rock he had used for a pillow and poured a little olive oil on it. He called the spot Bethel, which means The Place of God.

20-21. Then he prayed, "Lord, I promise to always love and obey You, because in spite of what I did, You forgave me and still love me. If You watch over me so I don't go hungry, and if You bring me safely home, then I'll know that I belong to You and that You really do care about me.

22. "This pile of rocks will remind me of how much You love me and that this place is holy. From now on I will give a tenth of all I earn to You, because I love You."

Jacob Meets Rachel

29 After many days Jacob finally got to the city where his uncle Laban lived.

2-3. He noticed a well near the city and three flocks of sheep waiting to be watered. A large stone covered the mouth of the well. When all the sheep

gathered, then the shepherds would roll away the stone. After they had watered their flocks, they would roll the stone back over the well.

4-6. Jacob asked the shepherds, "Where are you from?" They answered, "We're from here." He then asked, "Do you know a man named Laban?" "Yes, we do," they replied. Jacob asked, "How is he?" "Just fine. Oh, look! Here comes his daughter Rachel, with the family's sheep."

7-8. Jacob asked, "Why don't you go on and water your sheep so they can go back to feed in the pasture?" "We come here early," they answered, "because whoever gets here first is first in line to water his sheep. But we don't start until all the shepherds are here."

9-10. Jacob was still talking to them when Rachel came with her sheep. He felt sorry for her having to wait. So he rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered her sheep.

11. Then he said, "I'm your cousin! My mother is your father's sister." He gave her a big hug and started to cry because he was so happy.

12-13. When she realized that he was Jacob, Rebecca's son, she ran home to tell her father. Laban hurried to the well to meet Jacob. He gave him a big hug and took him home. The family asked about his mother and the rest of the family.

14. Then Laban said, "You're part of our family. Stay here for a month or so and see if you like it." Jacob agreed and helped his uncle take care of the sheep.

Jacob Gets Married

15. Some days later Laban said to Jacob, "I shouldn't let you work to help me just because you're my nephew. I want to pay you. How much do you think is fair?"

16-17. Now Laban had two daughters.

Leah was older; Rachel was younger. Rachel was more beautiful than Leah. **18-19.** Jacob loved Rachel from the day he met her at the well. So he said to Laban, "I love your daughter Rachel and would like to marry her. But I'm poor and have no way to support a family. I'll be glad to work for you for seven years, if you let me marry her." Laban answered, "I would rather have you marry her than for someone else to. Let's plan on it, and I'll pay you a fair wage."

20-22. So Jacob worked for seven years and saved his money. He loved Rachel so much that seven years seemed like nothing. When the time was up, Jacob said to Laban, "I've saved enough money to have a family, so Rachel and I would like to get married." Laban agreed, and the date for the wedding was set. Family and friends came from everywhere. It was a big celebration.

23-24. In those days the bride covered her face with a heavy veil. No one could see her face until the wedding was over, not even her husband. For a wedding present Laban gave his daughter a servant girl whose name was Zilpah. When the celebration was over, the bride and the groom went to their tent.

25. When Jacob woke up and looked at his bride the next morning, it was Leah! He hurried to Laban and asked angrily, "What is this? Why did you give me Leah instead of Rachel?"

26-27. Laban said, "Oh, you can have Rachel, too. But in this country the oldest daughter has to get married first. So let's wait for a week. Then we'll have a wedding for you and Rachel. That is, if you work for me another seven years."

28-30. Jacob loved Rachel very much. So a week later they were married.

Now Jacob had two wives. For a wedding present Laban gave Rachel a servant girl too. Her name was Bilhah. After Jacob and Rachel were married, Jacob worked for Laban another seven years.

31-35. Soon Leah had a baby, but it seemed as if Rachel couldn't have children. Leah named her baby Reuben. In time she had three more boys, Simeon, Levi, and Judah.

Jacob's Family Grows Larger

30 Still Rachel couldn't have children. Often she cried and talked to Jacob about it. He became angry and said, "God controls such things; I don't." Rachel replied, "Maybe Bilhah, my servant girl, can have a baby for me." To keep peace, Jacob agreed.

4-8. Then Rachel talked to Bilhah. She agreed and became like a third wife to Jacob. When she gave birth to a baby boy, Rachel was very happy. She named him Dan. Another baby boy was born to Bilhah, and Rachel called him Naphtali.

9. Leah had stopped having children, but she wanted more. So she suggested to Jacob that her servant girl have a baby for her, just as Bilhah had done for Rachel. To keep peace, Jacob agreed. Then Leah talked to Zilpah, and she agreed to become like a fourth wife to Jacob.

10-13. Zilpah then had a baby boy. Leah was very happy and called him Gad. When Zilpah had another baby boy, Leah named him Asher.

14-16. One day young Reuben brought home some mandrakes he found growing in the field. He gave them to his mother, Leah. When Rachel saw them, she asked, "May I have some?" Leah answered, "Mandrakes are supposed to make it easier to have ba-

bies. Tomorrow you may have some."

17-24. Leah also prayed, and the Lord answered her prayer. She had two more boys named Issachar and Zebulun. Then she had a girl named Dinah. After that Rachel finally had a son named Joseph. This gave Jacob eleven boys and one girl.

God Helps Jacob

25-26. About this time, Jacob talked to his uncle Laban and said, "I think it's time for me to go home. I've worked for you for fourteen years, watching over your sheep and cattle. You're richer now than when I came."

27-28. Laban replied, "Why don't you stay a little longer? I know that the Lord blesses you in everything you do, and that helps me, too. Tell me what I should pay you, because I really want you to stay."

29-30. Jacob said, "I've worked hard for you all these years. When I first came you had very few animals. Now we can hardly count them. There's no doubt that the Lord has blessed. I think I need to have my own flocks and herds, because I have a large family and need to support them."

31-34. Laban asked, "What can I do to get you to stay?" Jacob answered, "I'm willing to stay on one condition. You must pay me in sheep, goats, and cattle instead of money. I'm willing to take the black sheep and the spotted goats and cattle. That way we can tell them apart so no one can say that I stole them from you." Laban said, "That's a deal. We'll start today."

35-36. So Laban went and separated the black sheep and the spotted goats and cattle from the rest of the animals. Then he told his sons to take Jacob's animals some distance away and care for them there. He said to Jacob, "I want you to stay

and take care of my animals here."

37. Jacob didn't like the idea, but he couldn't do anything about it. Later someone told him that if he took green branches, cut the bark off in spots, and put them in front of the animals when they came to drink, the animals would give birth to spotted babies.

38-39. Jacob tried it, and it seemed to work. So when Laban's animals had babies, many of them were spotted. This was because the Lord was blessing Jacob, not because of the spotted branches.

40-41. Jacob kept putting spotted branches in front of the animals, and soon he had large flocks and herds of his own. Then he put spotted branches only in front of the strongest animals so that the strongest baby animals would be his.

42-43. God continued to bless Jacob's animals. In a few years Jacob had people working for him. They took care of his animals while he took care of his uncle's animals.

Jacob Goes Home

31 Soon Laban's sons were saying that Jacob had gotten rich because he had taken animals that really belonged to their father. Even Laban was not as friendly to Jacob as he had been before.

3-4. Then the Lord said to Jacob, "It is time for you to go back home." So Jacob sent word to Leah and Rachel to come and meet him in the field.

5-7. When they came, he said, "Your father is not as friendly to me as he was. But the Lord is still my friend. You know how hard I've worked for your father. I worked harder than anyone else. He hasn't been honest with me. But the Lord has helped me."

8-9. "When your father said that all the black and spotted animals were

mine, the animals started having black and spotted babies. When he changed his mind and said that only the animals with streaks were mine, then they had babies with streaks. That's how the Lord made sure I got paid for what I did.

10-12. "The Lord showed me in a dream how only the black, spotted, and streaked animals would mate. He even called me by my name and said, 'I'm the one who told the animals to behave that way, so your herds and flocks would increase.

13. "When you had that dream at Bethel, I was the one you saw standing at the top of the stairs. You promised to love and obey Me. So I forgave you for lying to your father and promised to be with you. Now it's time for you to return home."

14-16. Leah and Rachel replied, "We don't have to stay here. We're married to you. Our father hasn't been nice to us, either. And all the money he made from your hard work he's already spent. The animals the Lord has given you are yours. That's your pay for all the hard work you've done. Whatever the Lord has told you to do, let's do it."

17-18. So Jacob packed his tents, loaded the camels, and headed for home with his family. He also took all his servants and animals. He had heard that his mother had died. He was sad, but he couldn't wait to get home to see his father.

19. Before they left, Rachel ran to the house and got her father's small good-luck idols.

20-21. Then Jacob left, taking with him everything he owned. When they reached the Euphrates River, they crossed without any trouble and headed for the land of Canaan.

22-23. Laban had not been home when Jacob left, but as soon as he

heard about it, he took some of his strongest servants and went after him. Some days later he caught up with Jacob in the hill country.

24. That night God spoke to Laban in a dream, "Don't harm Jacob. And don't try to make him go back with you. It's time for him to go home."

25-26. Laban and his men camped across the valley from Jacob. Early in the morning they crossed the valley into Jacob's camp. Laban said, "Why did you leave without saying goodbye? What was the rush?"

27-28. "You could have waited until I got home so we could have had a going-away party. I didn't even have a chance to hug my daughters and kiss them goodbye.

29-30. "With these men of mine I could make you come back with me, but God told me to let you go. I know you're eager to get home and see your father, and I don't blame you. But why did you have to take my good-luck idols with you?"

31-32. Jacob said, "I left in a hurry before you got home because I was afraid you wouldn't let me go. As far as your little idols are concerned, I don't know what you're talking about. Go ahead and look for them. Whoever has them will pay for it with his life. If you find anything else that belongs to you, take it. I don't want anyone to accuse me of stealing from you."

33-34. Laban looked in all of the tents but Rachel's. He found nothing. Finally he went into Rachel's tent. She had hidden the little statues in her saddlebag. She was using her saddle as a chair with a blanket over it.

35. Rachel said, "Father, forgive me for not getting up, but I'm not feeling well." So he didn't make her get up. He searched her whole tent but didn't find the little idols.

36-37. When Laban finished, Jacob asked, "Why are you treating me like a thief? What have I done to you? Now that you have searched everything, what have you found that belongs to you?"

38-40. "I've worked for you all these years. Not once did I take a young animal that belonged to you, not even to feed my family. In fact, if a wild animal killed one of your animals, or if someone came by night and stole an animal from the thousands you had, you made me pay for it. I took care of your animals whether it was hot or cold, day and night. But I never complained."

41-42. "I was with you for twenty years. During that time you changed my wages ten times. If God had not been with me, you would have sent me home empty-handed. But God saw how hard I worked and how little you paid me. That's why He talked to you last night and told you to leave me alone."

43-44. Laban replied, "Leah and Rachel are my daughters, aren't they? And these sheep, goats, and cattle came from my animals, didn't they? I don't intend to take them back. But let's promise to be friends and put a stone marker here to remind us of that."

45-46. Jacob agreed and got a large stone and put it between them. Then he told his servants to get some more rocks and make a large stone marker. When they finished, Jacob and Laban sat down and ate together.

47-49. Each man gave the marker a name, but later it was called Mizpah, meaning Watchtower. Laban said, "May these stones always remind us of our promise." Jacob said, "May the Lord watch over each of us." So the people called the mountain The Place Where God Watches.

50-53. Then Laban said, "If you mistreat my daughters, God will know it. This marker is a reminder of the promise we've just made to each other. So let's put a big stone on top of it and pour some olive oil on it as a sign of peace. I will not cross over to attack you, and you will not cross over to attack me. If we ever do, may the God of our grandfathers be our judge." Jacob agreed.

54-55. So they sacrificed a lamb to the Lord. Then everyone sat down and ate. That night they all camped on the same little mountain. Early the next morning Laban blessed his daughters and grandchildren. He hugged them, said goodbye, and returned home.

Jacob Goes to Meet His Brother

32 Jacob continued on his way home. When he got near Canaan, the Lord opened Jacob's eyes, and he saw angels in front of him and behind him. He said to himself, "God sent His angels to travel with me, and I didn't even know it!" He called the place Two Groups of Angels.

3. When Esau heard that his brother was coming back, he took 400 of his strongest men and went to meet him. When Jacob heard about it, he was afraid.

4-5. Then he told two of his servants to go and meet Esau. "Tell him, 'Your humble servant Jacob has been living with Uncle Laban all these years. And the Lord has blessed him with many flocks and herds. He has a large family and lots of servants. He asks you to be merciful and forgive him for what he did to you.'"

6. When the servants came back, they said to Jacob, "We gave your brother your message, but he is still coming with 400 armed men."

7-8. When Jacob heard that, he really

was afraid. So he decided to divide his animals and family into groups. He said to himself, "If Esau kills one part of the family, maybe the others can escape."

9-10. Then Jacob prayed, "Lord, You told me to go back home. You also promised to take care of me. I know I sinned against You and my brother. I don't deserve Your mercy and kindness. When I first left home, I had nothing. Now I have a large family and many flocks and herds."

11-12. "But Esau is coming after me for what I did to him. I'm afraid he'll kill not only me but also my family. You promised that You would take care of me. And that someday my family would be so large that it would be hard to count them all."

13-18. The next morning Jacob decided to send some presents to Esau. He sent more than 400 sheep and goats, eighty camels, and thirty donkeys with his servants. "Take these animals to Esau, one group at a time. When Esau asks you where you're going with those animals, tell him that they are a present from me, his humble brother, Jacob."

19-21. The servants in charge of each group of animals were to say the same thing. They were to end their speech by saying, "Your servant Jacob is behind us." Jacob said to himself, "I hope my brother will forgive me!" Then he sent his servants in charge of the animals on their way.

Jacob Wrestles With the Lord

22-23. Before it got dark, Jacob told his family to cross the river, while he stayed behind to pray.

24-25. In the night he felt a hand on his shoulder, as though a man was attacking him. He fought with all his might! He didn't want to die without being forgiven. The fight lasted for

hours. Finally the man touched Jacob's hip. Just like that, the hip was twisted. Then Jacob knew that the man was the Son of God, who had come as an angel!

26. Jacob begged Him to protect him from his brother. The Angel said, "Don't keep holding on to Me. Let Me go, because it will soon be daylight, and I must go." Jacob replied, "I will not let go of You until You promise to protect me."

27-29. The Angel asked, "What's your name?" "It's Jacob." The Angel said, "I'm changing your name to Israel, because you wouldn't let go of Me until I promised to protect you. I forgive you, and I'll watch over you." Jacob said, "What's Your name?" The Angel answered, "You know My name." Then he blessed Jacob and disappeared.

30. Jacob sat on the ground in pain and said to himself, "That wasn't an angel. That was the Lord in the form of an angel. I was that close to the Lord and talked with Him, and I'm still alive? I can't believe it!" So he called the place The Face of God.

31-32. As the sun came up, Jacob limped across the river to join his family. He told them what had happened and why he was limping. From that day on, they never ate meat from the hip of an animal. It reminded them that God had touched Jacob.

Jacob and Esau Meet

33 Jacob looked off in the distance and saw Esau coming with his 400 men. He quickly divided his family. In the first group he put the two servant women and their children. Next came Leah and her children. Rachel and Joseph came last.

34. Then he went ahead of them to meet Esau. When he saw him, he stopped and bowed his head low to

the ground. When Esau saw Jacob, he ran to meet him. He hugged him, and they both started crying.

5. Esau asked, "Who are all these people?" Jacob replied, "This is my family that the Lord has given me."

6-7. The two servant women and their children got off their camels first. They bowed low and introduced themselves. Then came Leah and her children. Rachel and Joseph came last. Each bowed low as they introduced themselves.

8-9. Esau said, "Now, what about all the animals I saw?" Jacob answered, "I sent them for you, because I need you to forgive me for what I did to you." Esau said, "I have plenty of animals. You keep them."

10-11. Jacob said, "Please take them. Then I'll know that you've forgiven me. It's so good to see you again and to know that you're not angry with me. God has blessed me, and I have plenty of animals." Jacob kept urging Esau to take them until he finally did.

12-14. Then Esau said, "Let's go, and I'll lead the way." Jacob said, "I'm afraid my family can't travel as fast as you. Then too, if we drive the young animals too fast, they'll die. So please go on ahead, and we'll follow until we reach your place."

15-16. Esau agreed and said, "I'll go ahead, but let me leave some of my men with you for protection." Jacob answered, "We won't need them. God has promised to protect us, and I'm sure He will." So Esau took his men and Jacob's presents and returned home.

17-20. Then Jacob set up camp and the next day followed as best as he and the family could. When he got near the city of Shechem, he decided to stay there. So he bought some

property, built an altar to the Lord, and dedicated the place to God.

Jacob's Daughter Dinah

34 Jacob had a beautiful daughter named Dinah. She decided to visit the city of Shechem to make friends with some of the girls there. When the son of the king saw her, he invited her to the palace, but he did not treat her with respect.

3-4. The prince fell in love with Dinah. He talked to his father and told him that he loved Dinah and would like to marry her.

5-7. When Jacob heard about it, he decided to talk it over with Dinah's brothers as soon as they came back from the field. Meanwhile the king liked the idea and decided to go see Jacob to arrange for the wedding. But when Jacob told Dinah's brothers what he had heard, they didn't like the idea of their sister marrying someone who had not treated her well.

8-10. The king and the prince came to see Jacob. The king said, "My son is deeply in love with your daughter and would like to marry her. So I've come to get your permission. This would open the way for my people and your people to intermarry. The land will belong to both of us, and you could stay here and feel at home."

11-12. Then the prince spoke up. "Please let me marry Dinah. I love her very much. I'll do whatever you ask me to do. If you want gold or silver to show that I mean it, I'll give whatever you ask."

13-17. Dinah's brothers didn't want her to marry the prince. They said, "The only thing we ask is for you to get circumcised and have all the men in your city do the same. Then you can marry Dinah, and our sons can

marry your daughters, and we'll become one people. But if you don't, we can't let Dinah marry you, and we'll just move away."

18-19. Their suggestion pleased the king and his son, and so they agreed. Everyone in the city liked the young prince, so the king knew the men wouldn't mind being circumcised.

20-21. They went back home and said to the city fathers, "The sons of Jacob are good men. So let's share our land with them. This area is big enough for both of our people. And as their sons and daughters marry ours we'll become even stronger."

22-24. "There's just one condition. They want our men to be circumcised like they are. Just think, we'll own everything together with them because we'll be one people." The leaders agreed and asked the men of the city to be circumcised.

25-26. Three days later, when all the men were recuperating and couldn't fight, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, quietly came into the city with swords and killed every one of them. They even killed the king and his son. Then they took their sister home with them.

27-29. The other sons of Jacob went into the city and took whatever they wanted. They took the sheep and cattle, and even made some of the people their servants.

30. When they told their father what they had done, he was sick. He called Simeon and Levi, who had started it all, and said, "What you two have done is a terrible evil. The people around here thought we were good, but when the word of what you have done gets around, they could come and kill all of us."

31. They answered, "Father, surely you don't think we should have let

that ungodly prince marry our sister!" Jacob could not get them to see that what they had done was bad, because they believed they were right.

Jacob Moves to Bethel

35 God said to Jacob, "You need to move to Bethel. That's where I talked to you when you were running away from your brother. When you get there, build an altar and worship Me."

2. Jacob called everyone together and said, "God has told us to move to Bethel. So let's break camp and get rid of any statues of local gods you might have. Bathe and change your clothes."

3. "Bethel is the place where I saw stairs going to heaven and where God talked to me when I was afraid and running away from my brother. God promised to watch over me, and He has."

4. Then they gave Jacob their statues of local gods and jewelry, and he buried them.

5-8. God protected Jacob and his family all the way to Bethel, so Jacob thanked God for a safe trip. He built an altar and called it The Altar Dedicated to the God of Heaven.

9-10. Then God spoke to Jacob again and said, "I don't want you to forget that I changed your name from Jacob to Israel. So from now on when I talk to you, I will call you by your new name, Israel."

11-12. "I will bless you. Your family will grow into a small nation. Some of them will even become kings and rulers. The land you're standing on will be yours. As I promised it to your grandfather Abraham, so I am promising it to you."

13-15. Then Jacob built a pillar of stones and placed a flat stone on top. He poured a drink offering and some oil on it and said, "From now on, others

will call this place Bethel because they will see the pillar and will know that God spoke to me here."

Rachel Dies

16-18. Jacob decided to move to another place. On the way Rachel gave birth to a baby boy. She became very, very weak. She said, "Call my baby Benoni," and then she died. But Jacob called him Benjamin.

19-21. When Rachel died, they buried her near a little town that was later called Bethlehem. Jacob piled stones on her grave as a marker for everyone to see. Then they continued on their way.

22. After Rachel's death, Jacob's oldest son Reuben took Bilhah to be one of his wives. He didn't even ask his father, which was very bad.

23-26. Jacob had twelve sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher.

27-29. The family went on to Hebron to see Jacob's 180-year-old father, Isaac. Soon after that, Isaac died. But Jacob and his brother, Esau, had a chance to say goodbye to their father. Then they buried him.

Esau's Family

36 Soon after his father's funeral, Esau took his wives and children and all his animals and moved to another area, because there wasn't enough room for him and his brother's family and animals too.

9-15. The people there called Esau Edom and his children Edomites. Over the years his family continued to grow.

16-19. Some of Esau's sons became chiefs of tribes among their own people.

20-39. The local people also had

tribes. Chiefs of the larger tribes were called kings.

40-43. The area where each of these tribes lived was called by the name of that tribe.

Joseph's Dreams

37 Jacob remained in Canaan near where his father, Isaac, had died.

2. His 17-year-old son, Joseph, helped his brothers take care of the large flocks and herds they had. One day Joseph came home and told his father some of the bad things his brothers had been doing.

3-4. Jacob believed Joseph because he loved God and was always honest and kind. To show his love to Joseph, he had given him a robe like rich people wore, but his brothers didn't have nice robes like that. So they hated their brother and were mean to him.

5-7. One night Joseph had a dream and told it to his brothers. He said, "Listen to this dream I had! I saw people harvesting wheat and tying it into bundles. All at once my bundle stood up, and your bundles made a circle around mine and bowed to it."

8. His brothers laughed. "Are you telling us that we're supposed to bow to you and be your servants?" And they hated him still more.

9. Then Joseph had another dream. He said to his brothers, "Listen to this dream! I was looking up into the night sky, and all at once the sun, moon, and eleven bright stars appeared, and they all bowed to me."

10. Joseph also told these dreams to his father. Jacob said, "What kind of dreams are you having? Are we all supposed to bow down to you?"

11. After this Joseph's brothers were even more jealous. But his father

kept wondering what these dreams really meant.

Joseph Sold as a Slave

12-14. One day Joseph's brothers went to herd their father's sheep. When they didn't come back, Jacob got worried. So he said to Joseph, "Go find your brothers and see how they're doing." Joseph answered, "I'll be glad to go." Jacob said, "I'm really worried, because that area is not very safe. So come back as soon as you can."

15-17. Joseph had trouble finding his brothers. Finally a man asked, "What are you looking for?" Joseph replied, "My brothers. They're somewhere in this area herding our animals." The man said, "They left here a few days ago and went north to find better pastures." Joseph thanked him, and the next day he found his brothers.

18-20. When they saw him coming, they said, "Look! Here comes the dreamer!" They hated Joseph and decided to kill him. They planned to tell their father that a wild animal had done it.

21-22. When Reuben heard what his brothers were planning to do, he said, "Let's not kill Joseph. He is our brother. Let's just throw him into one of these empty wells and let him die." He said that because he wanted to rescue Joseph later and send him home.

23-24. When Joseph came closer, his brothers waved to him. But as soon as he came into camp, they grabbed him, ripped off his robe, and threw him into one of the wells.

25-27. Then they sat down to eat. Just then they saw a caravan coming. It was on its way to Egypt with all kinds of goods. Judah said to his brothers, "Let's not let Joseph starve to death. That's cruel. Why don't we sell him to these men going to Egypt? That way,

no one can accuse us of killing our brother." They all agreed.

28. So the brothers waved to the caravan to stop. They pulled Joseph out of the well and sold him as a slave even though he begged them not to.

29-30. Reuben wasn't there when they sold Joseph. When he came back to the well to rescue Joseph and saw that he wasn't there, he was frantic. He asked his brothers, "Where's Joseph? He's not in the well! If you have killed him, what will we tell Father?"

31. Then they told him what they had done. They decided to kill a goat, put some blood on Joseph's robe, and tell their father that a wild animal had killed Joseph.

32-33. When they got home, they showed the robe to their father and said, "We found this robe with blood all over it. Is this Joseph's robe?" Jacob looked at the robe and cried out, "It is! It is! A wild animal has attacked Joseph and killed him!"

34-35. Jacob mourned over Joseph many, many days. All his children tried to comfort their father, but it didn't work. He kept on saying, "Just leave me alone and let me die." That's how much Jacob loved Joseph.

36. When the caravan reached Egypt, they sold Joseph to an officer of the king's army named Potiphar.

Joseph's Older Brother Judah

38 One day Joseph's older brother, Judah, went to visit his friend Hirah. While there, he fell in love with a woman and married her.

3-7. They had three sons. When they grew up, the older one, Er, married a woman named Tamar. Not long afterward he died.

8-11. Then his brother Onan married Tamar, but soon he died too. So

Tamar went back home to live with her parents.

12-14. As time went on, Judah's wife also died, and he was lonely. So he decided to visit his old friend Hirah, who lived in the same area where Tamar and her parents lived. When Tamar heard that her father-in-law was in the area, she waited to see him.

15-16. Judah saw her on the street, but he didn't recognize her because her face was veiled. She seemed nice, so he decided to stay overnight with her. She said, "You need to give me something for it."

17-19. Judah said, "I'll send you a young goat." She replied, "That's fine. But how will I know that you'll keep your word?" Judah said, "I'll let you have my ring and shepherd's rod, and when you get the young goat, you can let me have them back." She agreed, and so they slept together.

20-23. Then Judah sent a young goat to the woman with his friend Hirah and asked him to get his ring and walking stick. Hirah was happy to do it. But when he got there, he couldn't find the woman anywhere. When he got back, he told Judah that he couldn't find her, and that no one knew where she was. Judah said, "I wonder where she is. I hope she still has my ring and shepherd's rod."

24. About three months later someone told Judah that Tamar was expecting a baby. This made him mad, since she had been the wife of his two sons who had died. So he and two of his men went to find out if this was true.

25-26. When they got there, she said, "I'm expecting a baby by the man who told me to hold on to his ring and shepherd's rod." Judah looked at the ring and rod and said, "They're mine. I'm the one to blame. I should have let my younger son Shelah marry her like

everyone thought he would. She is part of my family."

27-30. When the time came for the baby to be born, she had twins—two boys.

Joseph in Egypt

39 On the way to Egypt, Joseph decided that he would be faithful to God, no matter what. In Egypt, he was sold to Potiphar, captain of the palace guard.

3-6. Joseph worked hard, and the Lord blessed him in everything he did. Potiphar noticed that and decided to put Joseph in charge of his house. The Lord blessed Potiphar's house and the people in it. He also blessed his fields. Potiphar was so pleased that he finally put Joseph in charge of everything he owned.

7-9. Because Potiphar was gone so much, his wife was very lonely. She liked Joseph and thought that he could be her boyfriend while her husband was away. Joseph said, "I can't do that, because your husband is my master. He trusts me. And I would also be sinning against God!"

10-12. But Potiphar's wife didn't give up. One day when Joseph came into the house to do his work, she took hold of his coat and said she wouldn't let go unless he agreed to be her boyfriend. But Joseph wiggled out of his coat and ran.

13-15. When she realized that he had left her holding his coat, she decided to get even with him. So she screamed as loud as she could. When the servants came running, she lied and said, "Look at this! Joseph came into the house and tried to kiss me, and when I screamed, he left his coat and ran."

16-18. When her husband came home, she told him the same story and showed him Joseph's coat.

19-20. Potiphar didn't really believe

her, but he had to do something, because everyone else believed her. So he had Joseph arrested and thrown into prison. He didn't order Joseph killed, because he had not run away and hidden as if he were guilty.

21-23. Joseph was just as faithful to God in prison as he had been before. The jailer noticed this, because Joseph was different from the other prisoners. He was so pleased with Joseph that soon he put him in charge of all the prisoners. He trusted Joseph. God seemed to be with him, and he knew that Joseph loved God.

Two Dreams

40 Sometime later the king's chief servant and chief baker displeased the king of Egypt. He was very angry with what they had done. So he asked Potiphar to arrest them and put them in prison until he decided what to do with them. Potiphar took them to the jailer, who turned them over to Joseph.

5-7. One night each of them had a dream, and in the morning when Joseph made his rounds, he noticed how sad they were. He asked, "What is the matter?"

8. They said, "Each of us has had a dream, and we don't know what they mean." Joseph replied, "Only God knows what dreams mean. But tell them to me anyway."

9-11. The king's chief servant spoke first and said, "In my dream I saw a large grapevine with three branches. It began to blossom, and soon it was full of grapes. Next, I saw myself serving the king again."

12-13. God told Joseph the meaning of the dream, so he said, "I'll explain the meaning of your dream. The three branches are three days. In three days, you'll be taken out of

prison and returned to your job.

14-15. "When this happens, please tell the king about me. Maybe he'll be kind and let me out of prison too. Otherwise I'll be here the rest of my life. You see, I'm a Hebrew slave. I haven't done anything to deserve to be put in prison."

16-17. When the king's chief baker heard the meaning of his friend's dream, he decided to tell Joseph his dream too. He said, "In my dream I was walking with three baskets on my head. In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods I had made for the king. But birds were eating them, and ate everything up."

18-19. God told Joseph the meaning. "The three baskets represent three days. In three days the king will decide to have you put to death for what you did, and vultures will come and eat your body."

20. Three days later the king had a birthday and gave a party for all his wise men and servants. At the party he asked that his chief servant and chief baker be taken out of prison and brought in to see him.

21-23. While they were waiting, the king talked to his wise men about what to do with these two men. They decided to give the chief servant back his job, but to execute the chief baker for what he had done. That's exactly what Joseph had said would happen. But the chief servant forgot all about Joseph.

The King's Two Dreams

41 Two years after his chief servant returned to work, the king had a dream. He dreamed he was standing by the Nile River. Suddenly seven fat cows came out of the river and began eating grass. Then seven skinny cows came out of the

river and ate the fat cows. The king was so shocked by what he saw that he woke up.

5-7. Finally, he went back to sleep, but he had another strange dream. This time he saw seven large ears of corn on one stalk. On the stalk next to it were seven small ears of corn. Suddenly the seven small ears of corn leaned over and ate the seven large ones. Again the king was puzzled, and he woke up.

8. By this time it was almost morning, and he couldn't go back to sleep. So he got up and sent for his wise men. When he told them his dreams, he asked what they meant. But they couldn't help him.

9-13. His chief servant overheard the discussion and said to the king, "Your Majesty, I know someone who can help you. When the baker and I were in prison, we both had strange dreams and were puzzled as to what they meant. The jailer's assistant asked us why we were so sad. So we told him our dreams, and what he said they meant came true! I was given back my job and the chief baker was executed, just as he said."

14. So the king sent for Joseph who was told to quickly shave and change his clothes. Then guards led him to the palace.

15-16. When the king saw Joseph, he said, "I have had two bad dreams, and my wise men can't tell me what they mean. I understand that you can interpret dreams. Is that true?" Joseph answered, "I can't interpret dreams, Your Majesty, but God can."

17-23. So the king told Joseph about his first dream and the seven fat and skinny cows. Then he told him about his second dream and the seven large and small ears of corn.

24. The king said, "When I couldn't go back to sleep, I called my wise men

and asked them what these dreams meant, but they couldn't tell me."

25-27. Joseph said, "Your Majesty, both dreams have the same meaning. God is letting you know what is about to happen. The seven fat cows and the seven large ears of corn represent seven years. The seven skinny cows and the seven small ears of corn also represent seven years.

28-32. "God is telling you what will happen to Egypt. First, there will be seven years of good crops. Then there will be seven years of famine. God gave you two dreams with the same meaning to let you know these things will happen soon.

33-36. "I suggest that the king put someone in charge of the harvests. That man should have some people help him save some of the harvest during the good years. They should build storage bins in every city and bring part of the harvests there and guard it. This extra food should not be used or sold during the good years so that the people can have food during the bad years."

Joseph Becomes Governor

37-38. The king and his wise men believed Joseph's interpretation, as well as his suggestion about what to do. The king said, "Where can we find a man whom God has made any wiser? Let's put Joseph in charge of the harvests." They all agreed.

39-40. So he turned to Joseph and said, "Because God has given you wisdom to know the future, I'm putting you in charge of everything except my throne." Joseph was shocked.

41-42. To show that he was now in charge of the whole country, the king removed his ring and put it on Joseph. He had him change into fine clothes and wear the golden chain of government around his neck.

43. Then the king had Joseph ride through the city in a chariot behind his own. Guards walked ahead of them shouting, "Bow before the king and Joseph, his governor!"

44. When they returned to the palace, the king said to Joseph, "Remember, I'm the king, and you're my governor. You will be obeyed and treated with respect."

45. Then the king gave Joseph an Egyptian name meaning The Man Through Whom God Speaks. He also suggested that Joseph marry the daughter of the high priest, which Joseph agreed to do.

46-49. Joseph was about thirty years old when he became governor. During the seven good years there were huge harvests. Every year Joseph took some of the grain and stored it in the big cities.

50-52. During this time Joseph had two sons. He named the first one Manasseh, meaning God Has Made Me Happy. His second son was named Ephraim, meaning God Has Given Me a Home Away From Home.

53-55. Then the seven good years ended and the seven bad years began, just as Joseph had said. People in Egypt were going hungry. When they asked the king for help, he sent them to Joseph.

56-57. Things got really bad. Even people in other countries were suffering from the famine. So Joseph opened the storage bins and sold the people what they needed. The second year was just as bad as the first. Soon people from other countries came to Egypt to buy grain.

Joseph's Brothers Come to Egypt

42 When Jacob heard that Egypt had food, he said to Joseph's brothers, "You need

to stop complaining and do something. I hear that Egypt has lots of grain and is selling it. Go and buy some."

3-5. So Joseph's brothers went with others to buy food. But Jacob kept Benjamin, the youngest son, at home for fear that something would happen to him.

6. Everyone who came to Egypt had to go to see Joseph because he was the governor. His brothers came to see him and bowed, just as everyone else did.

7-8. As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them. But he pretended not to know who they were. He asked, "Where are you men from?" They answered, "We are from the land of Canaan." They still didn't recognize him.

9-11. Joseph remembered the dreams God had given him years before. He decided to test his brothers. So he said, "I think you men are spies!" They replied, "No, sir! We are humble people and have come to buy grain to feed our families. All of us are brothers. We're honest men, not spies."

12-13. Joseph responded, "You're spies!" They protested, "No, sir! We all belong to the same family. There are 12 brothers. One is dead, and the youngest is at home."

14-16. Joseph asked, "How do I know you're telling me the truth? I'll test you to see. You may not leave here until your youngest brother comes. One of you can go home and get him while I keep the rest of you under guard. If he doesn't come, then I'll know you're lying. I'll give you time to think it over."

17-18. Then he ordered them arrested and locked up for three days. On the third day he brought them in and said, "I have changed my mind."

19-20. "I'll let all of you go back home

to get your youngest brother, and only one of you shall stay here. So buy the food you need and be on your way. But when you come back, you'd better have your youngest brother with you, or the one who is here will be executed for spying."

21-22. They talked it over, saying, "This is happening to us because of the way we treated Joseph. He begged us not to sell him as a slave, but we ignored him." Reuben, the oldest, said, "Didn't I tell you not to hurt Joseph? But you wouldn't listen."

23. They didn't know that Joseph was the governor, and that he could understand everything they were saying.

24. Then Joseph excused himself and went to his office and cried. After wiping his tears, he returned and said, "I have decided to keep the one called Simeon." So the guards tied Simeon's hands and took him to prison.

Joseph's Brothers Go Home

25. Then Joseph sent word to the manager of the storage facility to give his brothers the grain they needed and some food for along the way. Then he was to put each man's money back in his sack.

26-27. So the brothers loaded their sacks on their donkeys and left for home. When they camped that night, one of the brothers opened his sack to give his donkey some grain, and there was his money!

28. He called his brothers and said, "Look! The money I paid for the grain is in my sack!" His brothers came running, and when they saw the money, they said, "God must be punishing us for what we did to Joseph!"

29-32. When they got home, they told their father everything that had happened. "The governor was hard on us. He thought we were spies. We told him

we were not spies but came to Egypt to buy grain. We also told him that we were twelve brothers. That one was dead and that the youngest was at home.

33-34. "But he didn't believe us. He said, 'I'll test you to see if you're telling me the truth. I'll keep one of you here. When you come back with your youngest brother, then I'll know that you're telling me the truth. I'll free the one you left, and you may buy food as often as you like.'"

35-36. After they finished their story, they emptied their sacks, and each man found his money there. When Jacob saw it, he too became frightened. He cried out, "Lord! Do I have to lose another son? Joseph is dead. Simeon is in prison. And now the governor wants to see Benjamin! This is too much!"

37-38. Reuben said, "Father, I promise that when we go back to Egypt with Benjamin, we will bring both him and Simeon back." But Jacob said, "I will not let you take Benjamin to Egypt! Joseph is dead, and Benjamin is the only son of Rachel's left. If anything happens to him, I'll die!"

Benjamin Goes to Egypt

43 The famine grew even worse. When the grain was almost all gone, Jacob said to his sons, "You need to go back to Egypt to buy some more."

3-5. "But Father," said Judah, "remember the governor wants us to bring our youngest brother along. We're ready to go, if you let us take Benjamin. If not, we can't go back, because the governor meant what he said!"

6-7. "Well, why did you have to tell the governor that you had a younger brother?" They answered, "Because the governor asked us about our families, our father, and if we had a

younger brother. We had to answer his questions. How would we know that he would ask us to bring our youngest brother with us?"

8-10. Judah said, "Father, let us take Benjamin along, for we need to get going. We don't have much food left. I promise to bring Benjamin back, or carry the blame the rest of my life. We've already waited too long. We could have been there and back by now."

11-14. Then Jacob said, "If that's the way it has to be, then take some nuts, honey, and spices for the governor. Take double the money, what you found in your sacks and what you'll need along the way. And take Benjamin. Hurry, before I change my mind. I'll be praying that the governor will let Simeon and Benjamin come back with you."

15. So the brothers hurried on their way with twice the money, the presents, and Benjamin.

16. When Joseph saw Benjamin, he said to his chief servant, "Have the cooks prepare lunch for twelve extra today. I want these men to eat with me."

17-18. The servant did as he was told and took the brothers to Joseph's house. The brothers were afraid and said, "The governor is taking us to his house because we didn't pay for the grain we got last time. When we get there, he'll have us arrested and make us his slaves."

19-22. When they were all inside, they said to the governor's servant, "Sir, we came here before and bought some grain. But on the way home we found the money in our sacks. So we brought it back to pay for what we got last time. We have no idea how our money got back in our sacks. We will also pay for what we are getting this time."

23. The servant said, "Relax; nothing

will happen to you. Maybe God put the money back in your sacks. All I know is that the grain you got the first time was paid for." When they got inside, Simeon was there waiting for them.

24-25. They were given water to wash up, while the governor's servants took care of their donkeys. Then they got their presents ready to give to the governor.

26-27. As soon as Joseph came, they bowed and gave him the presents. He thanked them and said, "Tell me about your families. How are they? How is your father, the old man you told me about? Is he still alive?"

28. They said, "He's alive and well. He wanted us to tell you that he is your humble servant." Then they all knelt down and bowed low.

29. When they got up, Joseph looked at Benjamin and said, "So this is your youngest brother. Now I know that you're not spies, but honest men coming to buy grain." Then he turned to Benjamin and said, "May God be gracious to you, young man."

30-31. Suddenly Joseph excused himself. He went to another room and had a good cry because he had finally seen his younger brother! Then he washed his face and went back in to see his brothers.

32-34. They had been seated according to their ages. They wondered how the governor knew to have them seated that way. When they were served, Benjamin was given twice as much. But not one of them was jealous or complained. They were all happy.

Joseph's Silver Cup

44 After lunch Joseph said to his chief servant, "Fill the sacks of these men with the grain they need and again put their money back in their sacks.

Also, put my silver cup in the younger man's sack, as well as his money for the grain."

3-6. The next morning the men started for home. But soon Joseph sent some armed guards after them to find out which one of his brothers had the silver cup in his sack. He told them to say, "Which one of you stole the governor's silver cup?" When the chief servant and the armed guards caught up with the brothers, they did just that.

7-9. The brothers answered, "Why would we steal the governor's cup? God forbid that we should do such a thing. We even returned the money we found in our sacks the first time we came. Does that sound as though we're thieves? If you find the governor's cup in one of our sacks, that man should be killed and the rest of us made the governor's slaves."

10. The chief servant said, "That will not be necessary. Only the man who has the cup will be the governor's slave. The rest of you may go home."

11-12. So each man took down his sack and opened it to show that they did not have the cup and were honest men. The chief servant searched every man's sack. Then he found the governor's cup in Benjamin's sack!

13-14. The brothers couldn't believe it! They all loaded their sacks and headed back to the governor. Judah led the way. When they got there, they all fell on their knees and bowed low.

15. Joseph replied, "What have you done? Don't you know that I have ways of finding out if people are honest or not?"

16. Judah answered, "Sir, what can we say? It looks as if we are guilty. You can make all of us your slaves, not just Benjamin."

17. Joseph said, "God forbid that I should make all of you my slaves.

Only the one who stole my cup will be my slave. The rest of you may go back home."

Judah Begs for Benjamin's Life

18-20. Then Judah got up off his knees and pleaded, "Sir, let me speak one more time, and please don't be angry. When we came the first time, you asked us about our father and if we had a younger brother. We told you the truth, that our father was old but well and that we did have a younger brother. We also said that originally there were twelve of us but that one brother was dead.

21-23. "Then you told us to bring our youngest brother with us the next time we came, to see if we were telling the truth. We said that if anything happened to our youngest brother our father would die because he loves him very much. You told us that if we didn't bring our youngest brother, there would be no next time.

24-26. "When we got home, we told our father what you said. He is like your servant, willing to do anything for you. But it wasn't easy for him to let our brother come. When we ran out of food, he told us to come back here and buy some more.

26-29. "We reminded him of what you had said—that you had to see our youngest brother yourself. Our father said, 'My wife Rachel gave me only two sons. Joseph got killed by a wild animal, and I've never seen him again. If anything happens to his younger brother, the pain will kill me, because I'm an old man.'

30-34. "Sir, if I have to tell my father that we left our younger brother in Egypt, he will die. If that happens, I'll feel as though I was the one who killed my father. I told him that I would protect Benjamin with my own life. Please

let me be your slave, and let the young man go back home with his brothers. How can we go back without him? Sir, what I've just told you is the truth!"

Joseph Tells His Brothers Who He Is

45 Joseph did not want to cry in front of his servants, so he told them to leave the room. He was alone with his brothers. Then he cried so loud that his servants could hear him throughout the house. Now they knew for sure that these men were Joseph's brothers. And they told the king what had happened.

3. Finally Joseph stopped crying. Speaking in their language, he said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Thank God my father is still alive!" His brothers were shocked. They couldn't believe it!

4-8. "Don't be afraid," he said. "Come closer." When they did, he said, "I am your brother Joseph! Don't be upset because you sent me here. God brought me to Egypt to keep you and your families alive. There are still five more years of famine to come. God knew all this, so He brought me here and put me in charge of all the land of Egypt."

9-11. "Hurry home and tell Father that I'm still alive and that I'm the governor of Egypt. Then all of you need to come here to live, because you'll need enough grain to last you until this drought is over. In the northern part of Egypt there is plenty of room for all of you to settle with your families and animals. I'll take care of you, so don't worry."

12-13. Joseph's brothers could hardly believe what they had heard. So he asked, "Can't you tell that I'm your brother? I'm talking to you in your own language. Go and tell Father everything you've seen, and that I

really am the governor of Egypt. Hurry, now, and be on your way."

14-15. Then he hugged and kissed Benjamin, and they cried. Next he hugged and kissed all his brothers and cried with each one.

16-20. When the king learned about all this, he was happy for Joseph. He sent a message saying, "I'm glad your brothers came and that you could see them again. Tell them to move here with their families and your father. We'll give them the best land in Egypt. Have them bring everything they own. Send wagons with them for their wives and children."

21-23. So Joseph gave his brothers wagons for their little ones. He also gave them the food they would need. To each brother he gave a change of clothes, but to Benjamin he gave five changes of clothes and 300 pieces of silver. He sent so many presents for his father that it took ten donkeys to carry it all. It took ten more donkeys just to carry the food for the trip there and back.

24-25. As they left, Joseph said, "Now, don't quarrel on your way home." Then they said goodbye and left.

26-27. When they got home, the brothers told Jacob that Joseph was still alive and that he was the governor of Egypt! Jacob couldn't believe it. So they took him outside and showed him the wagons and all the donkeys loaded with presents and food. He finally believed them and was filled with joy!

28. He said, "I see what you mean. Yes, Joseph is alive! And he's the governor of Egypt! Let's go see him!"

Jacob Goes to Egypt

46 So Jacob and his sons moved to Egypt with everything they had. On the way he stopped at Beersheba to offer a

lamb and to thank God for what He had done.

2-4. That night God spoke to him in a dream and said, "Israel, are you there?" He said, "Yes, Lord, I'm here." Then God said, "I am the God of your father, Isaac, and your grandfather Abraham. Don't be afraid to move to Egypt. I have not forgotten my promise. I will go with you and bring your people back home. You will see Joseph, and he will be with you when you die."

5-7. So Jacob took courage and went to Egypt, riding in one of the king's wagons. He and his sons also brought their flocks and herds along as Joseph had said. Finally they arrived in Egypt.

8-27. Just counting Jacob's sons, grandsons, and unmarried granddaughters, there were sixty-six descendants who came to Egypt with him. If we count Jacob, Joseph, and his two sons, that would make seventy. There were many more because this doesn't include the wives or married daughters that came.

28. When they reached Egypt, Jacob sent Judah ahead to tell Joseph they were coming. They would be heading north where the king told them to settle.

29. Then Joseph got in his chariot and rode as fast as he could to meet his father. When they met, they hugged each other and cried for a long time.

30. Finally Jacob said to Joseph, "Let me look at you. It's been so long since I've seen you! I can't believe you're alive!"

31-32. Joseph said, "Let me go back and tell the king you're here! I'll also explain that you are shepherds and cattlemen, and that you've brought your livestock with you.

33-34. "If the king wants to see any of you and he asks what you do for a living, tell him that you're his servants and are willing to live wherever he wants you to. Also tell him that you're shepherds, as your father and grandfather were, and that you'll be in Egypt only a little while. You need to be honest with him. Egyptians don't like shepherds, so he'll let you live by yourselves."

Jacob Meets the King

47 Then Joseph went to see the king and said, "My father and brothers are here, and they've gone to settle in the area north of here." Later Joseph took five of his brothers to see the king.

3-4. The king asked, "What do you men do for a living?" They said, "We're shepherds and cattlemen, as our father and grandfathers were. We've come to Egypt because back home things are very bad. The grass is drying up everywhere. So please let us settle north of here, and we will be forever grateful."

5. Then the king said to Joseph, "It's good to see that your family is together again.

6. "Pick the part of the country that's best for them. If they want to settle north of here, that's fine. While they're there, they can take care of my cattle, too."

7-10. Joseph thanked the king and then brought his father in. The king asked, "How old are you?" Jacob said, "I'm 130 years old. But I don't expect to live as long as my father or his father, because I've had a hard life." Then he thanked the king for his kindness and raised his hands and blessed him.

11-12. So Joseph took his five brothers and his father back north to settle

in the best part of Egypt. He made sure there was plenty of food for his father, his brothers, and their families.

The Famine Continues

13-15. But the famine in Egypt and Canaan continued to get worse. People kept coming to Joseph for help, and he sold food to everyone who came. When they ran out of money, they came to Joseph and said, "We have no more money. But we're hungry and need to eat."

16-17. Joseph would say, "Do you have any animals? If you do, I'll trade you." So the people brought horses, cattle, and donkeys to Joseph in exchange for food.

18-19. The next year the same thing happened. People said, "Our money and animals are gone, and we have nothing except our land. We'll be glad to work for you for food and grain. If we can keep a little plot for ourselves, then at least we can grow some food for our families."

20-21. Joseph agreed and paid them for their property, which then became the king's. So the people had to work for the king as if they were slaves.

22. The only people who owned property were the priests. The king provided for them.

23-24. Then the people came to Joseph again and asked for food because they couldn't grow enough on their little plots. He said, "I'll sell you food on one condition. I'll lend you some land that belongs to the king. You may work it for yourselves and your families. Let me have a fifth part of what you grow, and the rest is yours."

25. The people agreed and said, "Thank you for saving our lives. We will be forever grateful. And tell the king that we are his servants."

26. So Joseph made a law that a fifth

part of all the harvests in Egypt belonged to the king. The only people not included were the priests, because they still owned their land.

Joseph's Promise to His Father

27. Jacob and his family lived in the northern part of Egypt. There they owned land and rapidly increased in number.

28-30. Joseph's father lived another seventeen years until he was 147 years old. Before he died, he asked to see Joseph. When he came, Jacob said, "I want you to promise not to bury me in Egypt. Bury me in the land that God promised to give us." Joseph said, "Father, I promise."

31. Jacob continued, "Now I want you to seal your promise by making the same promise to God." Then Joseph promised God that he would keep his word to his father. When Jacob heard that, he was satisfied and thanked the Lord for having such a good son.

Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons

48 Not long afterward, Joseph heard that his father was now dying. So he took his two sons to see their grandfather one last time.

2. Jacob heard that Joseph and his two sons were coming to see him. So he used all his strength to sit up in bed for them.

3-4. When they came in, he welcomed them and said to Joseph, "Some years ago God spoke to me at Bethel, saying, 'I promise to be with you and bless you. Someday so many will make up your family that they will be like a small nation. I will give this land to them, and it will belong to them forever.'"

5-6. "Even though these two grandsons of mine were born in Egypt, they

are still part of my family. They and their children and grandchildren will belong to me too.

7. "When your brother Benjamin was born, your mother died. She would have loved to have had more children. So I'm accepting your two sons as if they were my own.

8-9. "Joseph, these young men are your own, aren't they? Or are they adopted?" Joseph said, "They're my own." Jacob said, "Bring them close to me so I can put my hands on them and bless them."

10-12. Now Jacob was almost blind. So when his grandsons came close, he reached out to find them. He hugged and kissed them. Then he said, "Joseph, I never thought I would see you again. But I did. And I've seen your sons too." Joseph could feel the presence of God in the room. So he and his sons knelt by Jacob's bed and bowed their heads in prayer.

13. When Jacob got ready to bless the two boys, Joseph told Manasseh to go over to his grandfather's right side because he was the older and for Ephraim to go to the left.

14-16. Then Jacob crossed his arms and put his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh. He said, "May God bless these young men as He has blessed me. May my name and the name of Abraham and Isaac live on through them and their children. May they have many descendants."

17. Joseph noticed that his father had crossed his arms and had put his right hand on Ephraim instead of his older brother, Manasseh. He thought his father had made a mistake because he couldn't see very well.

18-19. He said, "Father, you got the two boys mixed up. Manasseh is the older. That's why I put him on your

right." Jacob said, "I know. Manasseh will have a large family, but Ephraim's will be larger."

20. Then he continued his blessing and said, "People will think highly of Manasseh, but more highly of Ephraim. The younger one will be stronger than the older one."

21-22. Next he said to Joseph, "I'm about to die. God will continue to be with you. He will take you and your family back to the land He promised us. I want them to settle in the area where a prince wanted to marry your sister, Dinah. It's a good place. I often had to defend it against our enemies."

Jacob Blesses All His Sons

49 Then Jacob asked all his sons to come close to him so he could bless them. He said, "Listen, my sons, to what I have to say.

3-4. "Reuben, you're my first son. You're not always as dependable as you should be, but God will help you with that.

5-7. "Simeon and Levi, you're so much alike. You can't control your tempers. God will help both of you with that.

8-12. "Judah, your brothers look up to you. Some of your sons will become leaders and kings. God will bless you. You will have a large family, and everyone will respect you.

13. "Zebulun, you love the ocean. So you and your people will become sailors and have many ships. God will watch over you.

14-15. "Issachar, you love to work, but you have a tendency to work too hard. God can help you balance your life.

16-17. "Dan, you like to be in charge of things. Stay close to God, and He will help you lead by serving others."

18. Jacob got this far, and then he had to rest. He asked God to give him

strength to finish, which God did.

19. Then he continued: "Gad, you want to get along with everyone. That's good, but you need to be careful that others don't take advantage of you. God will help you know the difference.

20. "Asher, you like to farm and enjoy feeding others. God will bless you for that.

21. "Naphtali, you love the beauty of nature and like to run with the deer. You also love beautiful words and speak easily. God has given you that gift; use it for Him.

22-26. "Joseph, you have a good spirit and like to be free. You're like a good shepherd who is not afraid to protect his sheep. God will continue to bless you. You're like a prince among your brothers.

27. "Benjamin, you're quick and strong and not afraid to defend yourself. God will be with you as long as you depend on Him."

28-33. Jacob gave each of his sons a blessing that was right for him. Then he said, "Now I'm ready to die. I want you to take my body back home and bury me next to my father and grandfather. Abraham bought that property. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Rebecca are all buried there. The land there is ours." Then Jacob lay down and died.

Jacob's Funeral

50 When Joseph saw that his father had died, he kissed his face and couldn't stop crying. Finally he did, and left to go back home. Then he asked the funeral men to come and take care of his father's body.

3. Not only did the family mourn for Jacob; even the Egyptians did. They all mourned for a long time.

4-5. Then Joseph went to see the king's advisers and said, "Because I'm still in mourning, I'm not supposed to see the

king. Please speak to him for me. Tell him that before my father died, he asked me to take his body back home and bury him next to his father. So ask the king to please let me go and bury my father, and I'll come back."

6. The advisers went to the king, who said, "Tell Joseph that he has my permission to go and bury his father as he promised."

7-9. So Joseph left Egypt with his brothers and servants to bury his father. Many of the king's officials and advisers went with them. The families of all the brothers went too, except the children and livestock. A military escort with chariots and horses also went along to protect the people.

10-11. After they got to the Jordan River, they stayed there for one week, mourning the death of Jacob. When the people there saw all this, they said, "Whoever died must have been very important. Just look at how many people are mourning."

12-13. Then the sons of Jacob took their father's body across the river into Canaan while the Egyptians waited for them. They took his body to the property and the cave that belonged to Abraham.

14. When the burial ceremonies were over, Joseph and all those who were with him crossed back over the river and, together with the Egyptians waiting there, returned home.

Joseph Forgives His Brothers

15. Then Joseph's brothers said, "Now that Father is dead, we wonder what Joseph will do to us for selling him as a slave."

16-17. So they sent a letter to him at the governor's mansion. It said, "Our father told us that what we did to you was very wrong. Please forgive us. We all have the same religion and wor-

ship the same God." When Joseph read the letter, he cried.

18. A few hours later his brothers arrived. When they were taken in to see Joseph, they fell on their knees, bowed, and said, "We are willing to obey you and even be your slaves."

19-21. Joseph said, "Don't kneel down in front of me! I'm your brother! I am not God. So don't be afraid. You were angry with me when you sold me as a slave. But God turned bad into good! I've forgiven you. And I'll continue to take care of you and feed you and your families just as the king said I should." Joseph spoke very kindly to his brothers.

Joseph Dies

22-23. Joseph and his brothers and

their families stayed in Egypt for a long time. He lived to be very old. He not only held his grandchildren in his arms, but also his great-grandchildren.

24-25. One day he asked his brothers to come and see him. "I'm going to die one of these days. But God will continue to take care of you. He will take you back home to the land of our fathers. Promise me that you will take my body with you when you go." They agreed and promised to do so.

26. Not long afterward Joseph died. He was 110 years old. They put his body in a special coffin and kept it in an underground burial place until the time when the brothers and their families would return home.

Exodus

INTRODUCTION: *The second book of the Bible was written by Moses about 1450 B.C. We learn about his birth, where he grew up, and how God called him to be a leader. This book tells us about the ten terrible plagues God had to bring on Egypt before the king would let the Israelites go. God opened the Red Sea for His people, and at Mount Sinai He gave them the Ten Commandments. Also God asked them to build a sanctuary for Him, and then chose Aaron to be the high priest.*

The Children of Israel in Egypt

1 Jacob had twelve sons, and they all came to live with Joseph in Egypt, from Reuben the oldest, to Benjamin the youngest. As time went on they all grew old and died, including Joseph. Their families got bigger and bigger. Soon they took up the whole area of Egypt where they had settled.

8-10. Then a new king came to power who didn't know about Joseph or what he had done for the country. The king said to his advisers, "There are so many Israelites, soon they'll be stronger than we are. If there's a war, they could join our enemies, and we would be in real trouble. We need to stop them from having so many children."

11-12. So the king made all the Israelites his slaves. He made them work very hard building cities and other things for him. But the harder they worked, the bigger their families got, until the Egyptians became afraid of them.

13-14. So the king made them work even harder. They not only had to build things for the king, but also had to plant and harvest his fields.

15-16. One day the king called in two Hebrew nurses who were in charge

of delivering babies. He said to them, "From now on, whenever you deliver a baby boy, I want you to kill it. Do you hear me?"

17-19. But the nurses loved God more than they feared the king. So they let the baby boys live. When the king heard about it, he sent for the nurses and said, "Why are you letting the baby boys live? I want an answer!" The nurses said, "The Hebrew mothers deliver their babies fast. Before we can get there the babies are already born."

20-21. While God did not approve what they said, for the sake of the babies He protected these nurses. And the Hebrew families got bigger and bigger. Even the nurses had large families, and God blessed them, too.

22. The king was really upset over this. So he told his men to take every baby boy they could find from the Israelite slaves and throw them into the river as an offering to the river god.

Moses Is Born

2 A few years before this a young man and woman from the tribe of Levi had gotten married. About the time the king ordered all baby boys killed, they had a baby

named Moses. They decided to hide him until he was a little bigger and didn't look like a newborn.

3-4. After three months they couldn't hide him anymore. So his mother made a watertight basket for Baby Moses and set it in the bulrushes on the edge of the river. And Moses' sister, Miriam, hid near this place to see what would happen.

5-6. That morning the princess came to the river. As she was walking along, she saw a basket floating near the edge and told one of her servants to get it. When she opened it, she saw a baby inside, and he started to cry. She felt sorry for the little one and wondered how she could care for him.

7-8. Then the baby's sister came out from where she was hiding and said, "Princess, I know someone who can take care of the baby for you. Would you like me to go get her?" The princess said, "Please do." So Miriam ran home and got her mother.

9. The princess said to her, "I want you to take care of this baby for me, and I'll pay you for it. Take good care of him because when he's older I want him to come to the palace to live with me." The mother agreed.

10. When Moses was about twelve years old, the princess took him to the palace and adopted him as her own. So Moses became a prince.

Moses in Trouble

11. Moses went to school at the palace and learned how to be a soldier and a leader. One day he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave so hard that it looked as though the man would die from it.

12. Moses ran over to stop it and ended up killing the Egyptian. No one else was around, so he buried the Egyptian in the sand to keep it a secret.

13. The next day he went to see the Hebrew workers, and two of them were fighting. He stopped the fight and said, "You two shouldn't be fighting; you're both Hebrews."

14. The stronger of the two said, "Who made you our boss? Are you going to kill me, just as you killed the Egyptian?" From the way the man talked, Moses knew that the Hebrews didn't want him to be their leader.

15. Meanwhile the king heard what Moses had done. So he issued an order to have Moses killed. Moses quickly left the country and headed for the wilderness. Near a little village he noticed a well and sat down to rest, hoping that someone would come and give him a drink of water.

16-17. A priest named Jethro, who had seven daughters, lived nearby. The women came to the well to water their father's flocks. Some other shepherds came and tried to drive the women away. But Moses defended them and helped them water their flocks.

18-19. When the women got home, their father said, "How come you're home so soon?" They answered, "An Egyptian at the well defended us and helped us water our animals, so we finished early."

20. Jethro said, "Why didn't you invite him home with you? Go back and get him and have him come and eat with us."

21-22. So the daughters went back and brought Moses to their home. When Jethro heard Moses' story, he gave him a job as a shepherd. Moses fell in love with one of Jethro's daughters, Zipporah, and soon they got married. Not long afterward they had a baby boy and named him Gershom.

23-25. Meanwhile the king of Egypt died. The new king did not set the Hebrews free. But God heard their

prayers and decided it was time to help them and bring them back home. He had not forgotten the promise He had made to Abraham. God saw what they were going through, and His heart went out to them.

The Burning Bush

3 One day Moses was taking care of the sheep and goats near a mountain called Sinai. All at once he saw a bush on fire, but the bush didn't burn up. He said to himself, "How can that be? I'm going up there to see what this is all about."

4-6. So he went up the mountain and when he got near the bush, the Lord called to him from the fire, "Moses! Moses!" Moses answered, "I'm here." "Stop!" the Lord said. "Don't come any closer. Take off your sandals, because this ground is holy. I am the God of Abraham." Moses quickly took off his sandals, fell on his knees, and bowed to the ground.

7-9. Then the Lord said, "My people have asked Me to deliver them from slavery. I know their pain. It's time for Me to deliver them and to bring them back home, as I promised Jacob I would. I know how the Egyptians have mistreated them.

10-12. "I want you to go back to Egypt to see the new king and ask him to let My people go. Then I want you to bring them out." Moses replied, "But Lord, who am I to bring Your people out of Egypt? I'm just a shepherd. Please find someone else." The Lord answered, "I'll go with you. And when you bring them out, bring them here to this mountain to worship. When they hear Me speak to them, they'll know that I am the one who sent you."

13. Moses still didn't want to go back to Egypt and tell the Hebrews that God wanted him to be their leader. So he

said, "Lord, if I do go back, they'll ask who sent me. What should I tell them?"

14-16. The Lord said, "Tell them that the God of heaven and earth sent you, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Call together the elders and leaders and tell them that the great I AM talked with you in the wilderness and has heard their cry for help.

17-20. "Tell them that the time has come for them to be free and come back home. Don't worry; they'll believe you. Then take the elders with you to see the king and tell him that God wants the Hebrews to go to the wilderness to worship Him. The king will not let you go until I force him to do so. Only then will he let My people go.

21-22. "By the time that happens, the Egyptians will have learned to respect My people and will even give them presents before they leave. Every Hebrew woman is to ask her Egyptian neighbor, or the person for whom she works, for help along the way. And they'll gladly give you all you need."

Two Miracles

4 Moses protested, "But what if the elders and leaders don't do what I ask them to do, Lord? What if they don't believe me when I tell them You spoke to me?"

2-3. The Lord asked, "What is that in your hand?" Moses answered, "My shepherd's rod." The Lord said, "Throw it on the ground." Moses did, and it became a snake! Moses was terrified and turned and ran.

4. God called him back and told him to grab the snake by its tail. Moses did, and as soon he touched the snake, it turned back into a shepherd's rod.

5-6. The Lord said, "If the elders and leaders don't believe you, then do

this in front of them. Now put your hand inside your robe, then pull it out and look at it." Moses put his hand inside his robe and when he pulled it out, it was covered with sores.

7. The Lord said, "Now put it back in and pull it out again." Moses did, and when he pulled it out, the sores were gone, and it looked like it did before.

8. Then God said, "Some of the elders and leaders won't believe you even when they see your shepherd's rod turn into a snake. But when they see your arm full of sores and then turn back to normal, they'll believe you.

9. "If some still doubt, take them to the river, draw out some water, and pour it on the ground. As soon as you do, it will turn to blood. That will convince them."

10. Moses still didn't feel like going back to Egypt, so he came up with excuses. He argued, "Lord, I've forgotten the Egyptian language long ago. Besides, I'm not a good speaker. Please don't make me go back to Egypt."

11-12. The Lord asked, "Who made your mouth? Who can make someone speak when they're mute, someone hear when they're deaf, or someone see when they're blind? I can. So go back to Egypt to see the king, and I will give you the words to say."

13. Moses was still scared. He pleaded, "Lord, please send someone else, and let me stay here and take care of the sheep."

14. The Lord was not happy with Moses, but because He loved him, He said, "Aaron, your brother, is a good speaker. He can speak for you. I knew you would come up with excuses, so I already told him where you are, and he's coming to find you.

15-17. "You can speak to him in Hebrew, and he'll speak to the king in

Egyptian. I'll help both of you. Aaron will be like a mouth for you, but I will tell you what to say. Be sure to keep your shepherd's rod because it is a symbol of My power."

Moses Goes to Egypt

18. Then Moses took the sheep back home and told his father-in-law what had happened and that God had asked him to return to Egypt. His father-in-law said, "May God bless you and keep you safe."

19. The Lord said to Moses, "Don't be afraid to go back to Egypt. All those who wanted to kill you are dead."

20. So Moses took his wife and two young sons and headed for Egypt. He made sure he had his shepherd's rod, also.

21. The Lord said to him, "When you get to Egypt and see the king, do all the miracles in front of him that I told you to. He will be stubborn, but don't be afraid of him.

22-23. Tell him that I love the Hebrew people like a son. I want him to let them come out here to worship Me. If he refuses, tell him that I will take the life of his firstborn son."

24. At one place where Moses and Zipporah stopped for the night, an angel spoke to him in a dream, saying, "You didn't circumcise your youngest son, as you did your first one. You need to do that if you want God to go with you to Egypt."

25-26. The next morning Moses told his wife what the angel had said. Even though she didn't like the idea, she circumcised the boy. Then the angel blessed them for it. But as Moses thought about the dangers in Egypt, he decided to send his family back home, where they would be safe.

27. Before all this, the Lord had said to Aaron, "Your brother is on his way

back to Egypt, but he's coming alone. I want you to go and meet him." So Aaron went and found Moses at Sinai, the mountain of God, and when they met, they hugged each other and had a long cry.

28. Then Moses told Aaron everything that had happened since he had left home. He also told him about the burning bush, that the Lord had told him to go back to Egypt, and about the miracle of the shepherd's rod and the big sores on his arm.

29. When Moses and Aaron got back to Egypt, they called together the elders and leaders and told them what had happened.

30. Then Moses performed the same miracles for them that the Lord had done for him beside the burning bush.

31. When they heard what had happened and saw the miracles, they believed Moses and knew that the time had come for them to be free. They thanked God for hearing their prayers, bowed down, and worshiped Him.

Moses and the King

5 After this Moses, Aaron, and the elders and leaders went to see the king. They told him that the God of heaven had commanded His people to go to the wilderness to worship Him. The king said, "Why should I listen to your God? Our gods have blessed our country and made it great. I will not let you go!"

3. Moses and Aaron answered, "God has told us to do this. We need to go to worship Him as He said. If we don't obey, He will do something powerful to let everyone know that He means what He says."

4-5. The king asked, "What right do you have to tell my Hebrew slaves to take time to go and worship? Go back and tell your people to get to work!

You've already created enough problems by telling them to rest on the Sabbath. You heard me—tell them to get back to work!"

6-7. That very day the king said to his officers, "Stop giving these Hebrew slaves the straw they need to make bricks. From now on they can find their own straw.

8. "But they still have to make the same number of bricks. If they can take time off to rest on the Sabbath, they should have time to find the straw they need.

9. "I want you to make them work harder than ever. That will stop them from listening to Moses and Aaron, and soon they'll forget all about going to worship their God."

10-11. The officers went to the Hebrew men in charge and told them that the king wanted them to stop giving the slaves the straw they needed. They now had to find their own straw, but they also had to make the same number of bricks.

12-13. So the people went everywhere looking for straw. And the king's officers kept reminding the Hebrew foremen not to fall behind in their quota of bricks.

14. When the people fell behind, the Hebrew foremen were whipped. The king's officers said to them, "You fell behind yesterday and today. No more! Do you hear?"

15. Then the foremen went to see the king and said, "Your Majesty, why are your officers beating us? We can't possibly make the same number of bricks.

16. "We have to find our own straw. Yet your officers keep telling us not to fall behind in our daily quota. When we do, they beat us. But it's not our fault. It takes time to find straw. Your officers are being unreasonable."

17-18. The king said, "You're just lazy

and don't want to work. That's why you want to go and worship your God. Now get back to work! I'm not changing a thing!"

19. From what the king said, the foremen knew they were now in trouble with the king's officers for having complained.

20-21. As they were leaving, they met Moses and Aaron, who had come to see the king. The foremen said, "You two are to blame for all this. May God punish you for what you have done to us. The king and his officers are making us work harder than ever. They now hate us so much that they could kill us."

22-23. Moses and Aaron listened, but said nothing. After the foremen left, Moses prayed, "Lord, why did You let this happen? Ever since I asked the king to let us go so we could worship You, things have gone from bad to worse. We don't understand."

God Explains

6 The Lord said to Moses, "You will yet see what I will do to make the king let you go. In fact, he will drive you out.

2-5. "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I talked to them and promised to give them the land of Canaan as their own. And I will keep My promise.

6-8. "Tell My people that I will bring them out of Egypt and set them free. I will work miracles that they have never seen before. I will let all the countries around Egypt know that they are My people and that I am their God. And I will bring them into the land that I promised to give them."

9. So Moses went and told the people what the Lord had said, but they would not listen, because their hopes to be free had been crushed by the king.

10-11. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go and tell the king to let My people go."

12. Moses said, "If my own people won't listen to me, why should the king? I'm just another one of those Hebrews to him. He won't listen to me."

13. The Lord said, "I want you and Aaron to go to the king and to tell him to let My people go."

The Family Line

14-26. Moses' ancestry goes back to Jacob, who had twelve sons. They were heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. Eventually Moses and Aaron were born. They belonged to the tribe of Levi, from which God's priests came.

27. Moses and Aaron were the men who went to see the king to tell him to let God's people go.

28-29. When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, He had said to him, "I want you to go back to Egypt and tell the king everything I say to you."

30. But Moses had been scared and complained, "I'm no better than anyone else. Why would the king of Egypt listen to me?"

Moses and Aaron

7 The Lord continued, "After you do all the miracles I will ask you to do, the king will respect you as if you were God and Aaron were your prophet.

2. "Say what I want you to say in Hebrew, and Aaron will interpret and speak to the king in Egyptian. He will make it plain to the king that I want him to let My people go.

3-5. "The king will be stubborn and will not let My people go. I'll have to do something terrible to get him to listen, and then he'll let them go. When that happens, the Egyptians will know that I am the one who is freeing My people."

6-7. Moses and Aaron did what the Lord asked them to do. Moses was **eighty** years old and Aaron eighty-three when they went in to see the king.

8-9. The Lord told Moses, "When the king asks for a miracle, tell Aaron to throw the shepherd's rod on the ground, and I'll turn it into a snake."

10. Moses and Aaron went in to see the king, and he asked for a miracle, just as the Lord had said. So Aaron threw the shepherd's rod on the ground, and God turned it into a snake.

11-12. Then the king asked his wise men to use their magic to do the same thing. They threw down their walking sticks, and it looked as if they had turned into snakes. Then God made Aaron's snake swallow up all the sticks.

13. But the king still refused to let God's people go.

The First Plague

14. The Lord said to Moses, "I told you the king would be stubborn.

15. "Tomorrow morning I want you to go down to the river to meet the king. He'll come there to worship his river god. Be sure to take your shepherd's rod along.

16. "When he comes, say to him, 'The God of heaven wants you to let the Hebrews go to worship Him. It's very important.

17. "If you want to know who the God of heaven is, watch what He can do. When Aaron touches the river with his shepherd's rod, the water will turn to blood.

18. "The fish will die, and your river god won't be able to stop it. And the people won't be able to drink from the river as they do now.'

19. "Then have Aaron point the shepherd's rod toward the land, and the streams and lakes will also turn to

blood. Even water stored in containers will turn to blood."

20. The next morning Moses and Aaron went down to the river to meet the king and his wise men. Moses told the king what the Lord had said, then handed Aaron the shepherd's rod. When Aaron touched the river, God turned the water into blood.

21. The fish died and floated to the top, and the river smelled so bad that nobody wanted to come near it.

22. Then the king told his servants to dig a hole next to the river until they found clear water. When they did, he asked his wise men to use their magic to do the same thing. And they did. So the king refused to listen to Moses and to let the Hebrews go.

23-25. Then the king left and went back to his palace. And the people had to dig for their drinking water, because the river stayed that way for a whole week.

The Second Plague

8 God said to Moses, "Go back to the king and say to him, 'The God of heaven wants you to let the Hebrews go to worship Him.

2-4. "If you don't, I will fill the whole country with frogs. The river will be full of them, and they will come into your palace and even into your bed. They'll also come into the houses of your people, into their kitchens and be all over their pots and pans. They'll jump on you and on all of your people and on your servants.'"

5. So Moses and Aaron went to see the king and told him what the Lord had said.

6. Then Aaron held out the shepherd's rod toward the river, and frogs not only came out of the river but also out of the streams and lakes. Frogs were everywhere.

7. The king asked his wise men to use their magic and bring frogs out of the river, and they did. So the king refused to let the Hebrews go. Then the king asked his wise men to get rid of the frogs, but they couldn't.

8-9. So the king called Moses and Aaron to the palace and told them to get rid of the frogs, and he would let the Hebrews go. Moses said, "Tell me when you want the frogs to be gone, and I'll ask God to get rid of them."

10-11. The king replied, "By this time tomorrow." Moses answered, "Fine; by this time tomorrow they'll be gone. There is no God like our God. The frogs will not be in the palace to bother you, nor in the houses of your people; but there will always be some in the river."

12. Then Moses and Aaron left the palace. Moses prayed and earnestly asked God to get rid of the frogs.

13-14. The Lord answered Moses' prayer. The next morning all the frogs died where they were, in the houses, on the streets, or in the gardens. The people made large piles of them, and the whole country smelled because of the dead frogs.

15. When the king saw that the frogs were gone, he was relieved, but he changed his mind and would not let the Hebrews go. This is what the Lord had said he would do.

The Third Plague

16. The Lord said to Moses, "Go back to see the king. When you get there, give Aaron the shepherd's rod and have him stretch it out and then strike the ground. The dust in the air will turn into tiny, stinging gnats."

17. Moses and Aaron went to see the king, and when Aaron stretched out his rod and struck the ground, the dust in the air turned into tiny, stinging gnats.

18-19. The king asked his wise men to do the same, but they couldn't. The tiny gnats were everywhere. The wise men said to the king, "There's no doubt that the God of the Hebrews is doing this." When the gnats were gone, the king again refused to let the Hebrews go.

The Fourth Plague

20. The Lord said to Moses, "Tomorrow morning, go to the river to meet the king. Say to him, 'God wants you to let the Hebrews go to worship Him.'

21. "If you don't, God will bring millions of flies into your country. They'll be in your palace and in all the houses. They'll be all over you and your people."

22-23. "But I will not send the flies into that part of the country where the Hebrews live. From now on I will make a difference between your people and My people so you will know that I am God."

24. So Moses and Aaron went to see the king and told him what the Lord had said. The next day the flies came. They were in the palace, in people's houses, and all over everything. But there were no flies where the Hebrews lived.

25. The king called for Moses and Aaron and said, "I'll let your people take time off to worship your God, but they have to do it here, not off somewhere else."

26-27. Moses answered, "That won't work, because we have to sacrifice different animals to the Lord, which will offend the Egyptians. When they see us do that, they'll kill us. We need to go into the wilderness to worship God just as He said."

28. The king replied, "All right, I'll let you go, but don't go far. And when you worship your God, pray for me."

29. Moses said, "As soon as I leave

the palace, I'll pray for you, and this time tomorrow the flies will be gone. But don't change your mind and refuse to let us go."

30-31. Then Moses left the palace and asked the Lord to remove the flies. And the Lord did. All the flies were gone; not one was left in the whole country.

32. But the king changed his mind again and refused to let the Hebrews go.

The Fifth Plague

9 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go back to the king and say, 'God wants you to let the Hebrews go.

2-5. "If you don't, all the animals you leave in your fields will get sick and die—the horses, donkeys, cows, camels, sheep, and goats. But the animals of the Hebrews will stay healthy and will not die. This will happen first thing tomorrow morning."

6. The next day all the animals the Egyptians had left in the field got sick and died, but not the animals of the Hebrews.

7. The king sent some men to check it out, and they found that what Moses had said was true. But the king still refused to let the Hebrews go.

The Sixth Plague

8. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Take a handful of ashes from a fire and go with Aaron to see the king.

9. "When you get there, throw the ashes into the air, and the ashes will turn into black soot that will fill the whole country. Wherever this black soot goes, people and their animals will break out with big sores."

10. So Moses took a handful of ashes from a fire and, together with Aaron, went to see the king. He threw the ashes in the air, and they turned into

black soot and spread throughout the country. Wherever it went, people and their animals broke out with big sores, just as the Lord had said.

11. Even the king and his wise men broke out with sores and were so sick that they couldn't even come to the palace to do business.

12. Even though he was sick, the king still refused to let the Hebrews go.

The Seventh Plague

13. The Lord said to Moses, "Tomorrow I want you to go with Aaron to see the king again and say to him, 'God wants you to let the Hebrews go.

14-16. "If you don't, He will make things still worse for you. You and your officials will finally realize that there is no god like the God of heaven. He could have brought on a plague so terrible that all of you would die. But He didn't do this, because He wants you to live.

17-18. "In spite of this, you have become more stubborn and have refused to let the Hebrews go. So He has no choice but to make things worse until you listen and obey. Tomorrow God will bring a hailstorm on Egypt, something you haven't seen before.

19. "You need to tell your people to bring whatever animals are left back inside and stay in the house. The hailstorm will be so severe that it will destroy anything outside."

20. When the king's officials heard this, they were afraid. They sent word to their own servants and to the people to bring their animals back inside and stay in their houses.

21-22. But some didn't listen. The next morning the Lord said to Moses, "Point your shepherd's rod toward the sky, and I will send the hailstorm. The hailstones will be so big that they will kill anyone or any animal outside."

23. Moses did as he was told, and the Lord sent a terrible storm with thunder and lightning and huge hailstones throughout the whole country.

24-25. The hailstones fell everywhere, and the thunder and lightning were terrible. It was the worst storm that people had ever seen. All the crops were destroyed, the leaves on all the trees were gone, and any animals left outside were killed.

26. The only place the storm did not go was where the Hebrews lived.

27-28. During a lull in the storm the king called for Moses and Aaron and said, "I and my officials have been wrong. We have not listened to your God. Pray for us and our people and ask God to stop the storm. I'll let the Hebrews go."

29. Moses said, "As soon as we leave the city, I'll ask God to stop the storm. The dark clouds will be gone, and there'll be no more hail. Then you'll know that the God of the Hebrews is the God of heaven and earth."

30. "But I know that you and your officials don't believe that."

31-32. By this time all the crops ready to be harvested were ruined. The only ones saved were those that hadn't come up yet.

33. Then Moses and Aaron left the palace. Once out of the city, Moses prayed for the king and his people. Suddenly the thunder and lightning stopped, the dark clouds blew away, and there was no more hail.

34-35. But the king and his officials became more stubborn than ever, and they would not let the Hebrews go.

listen. I'll have to show them that I mean what I say.

2. "The next three plagues will not only give the king something to think about, but My people will never forget what I had to do to get the king to let them go."

3. So Moses and Aaron went to see the king and said, "God wants to know how much longer you'll refuse to listen to Him and not let the Hebrews go."

4-6. "If you refuse again, tomorrow morning He will bring a huge swarm of locusts into the country. There will be so many of them that they'll cover the ground. They'll eat up every green thing that was left from the hail-storm. They will come into your palace and into the houses of the people. You will have never seen anything like it."

7. Some of the officials said to the king, "How much longer will you refuse to listen? At least let the Hebrew men go to worship God. Our country has suffered enough. Why make things worse?"

8. So the king told Moses and Aaron, "I'll let the Hebrews go. Tell me, which ones have to go to worship your God?"

9. Moses answered, "We all need to go—men, women, and children. We even have to take our animals with us, because that's what God wants us to do."

10. The king said, "I'll never let all of you go. From what you just told me, I can see that you don't intend to come back. That means you're really asking for trouble."

11. "My answer is no. I'll let the men go, but not the women and children. If you want to go and worship your God, then go! You have my permission. Now get out of here!"

12. The Lord said to Moses, "Take your shepherd's rod and point it over

The Eighth Plague

10 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to see the king again. He and his officials still refuse to

the land. This will be a sign for the locusts to come and eat everything green that was left by the hailstorm."

13-14. Moses did what the Lord said, and God caused a strong wind to blow all that day and night. By morning the locusts came. They went through the whole country except where the Hebrews lived. It was the largest swarm of locusts that anyone had ever seen.

15. There were so many of them that people couldn't see the ground. The locusts ate up everything in the field, in the garden, and from the few leaves still on the trees.

16-17. Then the king called for Moses and Aaron and pleaded, "I have not listened to God as I should have. Forgive me and ask God to please take away all these locusts."

18-19. So Moses left the palace and prayed for the king and the people of Egypt. God heard his prayer and brought a strong wind, which picked up all the locusts and blew them across the country into the sea.

20. Once the locusts were gone, the king changed his mind and would not let the Hebrews go.

The Ninth Plague

21. Then the Lord said to Moses, "I don't want you to go to see the king. Point your shepherd's rod toward the sky, and I will bring a darkness over the whole country that will be so thick that you can feel it."

22-23. Moses did what the Lord asked him to do, and it became dark all over the country. People couldn't even see each other. It was this way for three days. But where the Hebrews lived it was light.

24. Then the king called for Moses and Aaron and said, "Go and worship your God—all of you, men, women,

and children. But your animals will have to stay. Now, go!"

25-26. Moses said, "We have to take our animals with us. God wants us to sacrifice some of them, but He hasn't told us which ones. So we have to take all of them along."

27-28. When the king heard that, he changed his mind and would not let the Hebrews go. He yelled at Moses, "Get out of my sight! I don't ever want to see your face again. If you ever come back to see me, I'll kill you!"

29. Moses replied, "Unless God tells me otherwise, I promise not to come to see you again." So he left the palace and went back to his people.

The Oldest Boys Die

11 Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will bring one more plague on the king, and this time he will let you go with everything you have. He'll even be glad you're leaving."
2. "Tell the people to go to the Egyptians and ask for their pay in clothes and jewelry. Then they should go to their Egyptian neighbors and ask them for help too."

3. The Egyptians had learned to respect the Hebrew people because of God's miracles, so they did everything they could to help them—even the king's officials helped them. Moses was highly respected.

4-5. Then Moses went to see the king and said, "The Lord has decided that at midnight tonight the firstborn son in every family in Egypt will get sick and die, all the way from the king's family down to the family of workers, even the animals."

6-7. "Families throughout the country will be crying. Nothing like this has ever happened before. But nothing will happen to the firstborn sons of the Hebrews. Then everyone will know

that there is a difference between those who worship God and those who don't.

8. "When the firstborn son in every family dies, you will beg us to leave. And we will leave with everything we have." Moses was very upset with the king because he had changed his mind so many times.

9. Before Moses had gone to see the king, God had said, "Don't be afraid. I will not let the king hurt you. He will not let My people go until the firstborn sons in all of Egypt die."

10. Each time Moses and Aaron had talked to the king they had warned him ahead of time what would happen. But each time, the king became more and more stubborn and refused to let the Hebrews go.

The Passover

12 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Tell the people that I am giving My people a new calendar. This will be the first month.

3-4. "On the tenth day of this month I want each father to pick out a lamb. Four days later he shall kill it for food for himself and his family. If there's too much for one family, let several families eat together.

5-6. "If the father doesn't have a lamb, he can use a goat. But whether it's a lamb or a goat, it must be one year old and healthy. He should take special care of it for four days. Just before sundown on the fourteenth day, kill it and prepare a fire to roast the meat.

7. "Also, I want the father to take some of the blood and put it on the outside doorpost of his house.

8-9. "Then the family should roast the meat and eat it with unleavened bread. All the meat should be roasted at the same time. No meat should be eaten that has not been roasted.

10-11. "The people may eat as much as they want. Whatever is left over should be burned. They should eat quickly, as though they're in a hurry to go on a trip. They should have their coats and shoes on and their walking sticks nearby.

12. "That night I will send My angel through the land of Egypt, and the firstborn son in each family will get sick and die, including the firstborn of the animals.

13. "But when My angel sees the blood on your doorposts, he will pass over your houses, and no one in your families will be hurt. Then everyone will know that I am the God of heaven and earth.

14. "The fourteenth day of the first month on your new calendar will always be a special day.

15. "Beginning the fifteenth day, you should eat only unleavened bread for one week. On that day, get rid of all baking yeast in your house so that you won't be tempted to make the regular kind of bread.

16-17. "The first and the last day of that special week you should rest. Don't do any work on those two days, except what's absolutely necessary to survive. I want you to keep this special week every year as a reminder of the time I brought you out of Egypt.

18-20. "So from sundown on the fourteenth to sundown on the twenty-first you should eat bread made without yeast. During that week, have no baking yeast in the house so that you won't be tempted to make regular bread and eat it. Do this each year, no matter where you live."

21-22. Moses then told the people, "It is time to get ready to celebrate what will be called the Passover. Be sure to sprinkle some blood on the outside door-

posts of your houses and make sure that every family member is inside.

23. "At midnight God's angel will bring death to every house in the land of Egypt, but not to the Hebrew houses that have blood sprinkled on the doorposts."

24-25. Moses also told them that the Passover should be celebrated every year from now on, even after they reached the land of Canaan.

26-27. He said, "When your children ask what this celebration is all about, tell them about the time when you were slaves in Egypt, when all the first-born sons died, but not yours. That was the night when you were set free."

28. When Moses finished, the people bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord. Then they went home and did everything Moses had told them.

The Tenth Plague

29. At midnight God's angel went through the land of Egypt, and every firstborn son from the king to the prisoner got sick and died, even the firstborn of the animals.

30. It was still dark when the king and his officials found their firstborn sons dead. There was crying in every home throughout the country.

31-32. Then the king called for Moses and Aaron and said, "Take your people and get out. Go and worship your God. Take everything with you, your women and children and all your animals. Now go! But don't forget to pray for me!"

33. The Egyptians urged the Hebrews to hurry up and go because they were afraid of what else might happen to them.

34. The children of Israel had listened to Moses and done exactly what God wanted them to do. They were all dressed to go and had their things

packed, including the food they needed. **35-36.** They also took the extra clothes and gold and silver that the Egyptians gave them for the work they had done. In fact, they received more in presents than expected.

37. So the children of Israel left Egypt to go and worship God as He had told them to. There were so many men, women, and children you could hardly count them—more than 600,000 men, not counting all the women and children.

38-39. Some Egyptians decided to go with them. And there were also thousands of animals. The Israelites left in such a hurry that they had to bake some of their bread along the way.

40-41. They had been strangers in Canaan and Egypt for 430 years, many of those years as slaves in the land of Egypt. But now they were a free people.

42. In one night the Lord brought His people out of Egypt and passed over them so that their firstborn sons did not die. That's why the day is called the Passover.

43. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Those Egyptians who left with you because they were scared of what might happen to them if they stayed, but who don't want to be part of My people, are not ready to eat Passover meals with you."

44-45. "If they want to be part of My people, they should be circumcised. Then they can eat the Passover meal with you. But if they plan to leave you someday, they should not be included."

46-47. "The Passover meal should always be eaten in a house made ready for it. No one should eat it outside. Everyone should keep the Passover to help them remember the day they were set free."

48-49. "In the future, people living around you who want to be part of you must be circumcised before they

can be included in this special meal. This rule applies to everyone, whether they are Hebrews or not."

50-51. All the people who came out of Egypt, and those who came with them, did what Moses said. And when they left, they left in groups called tribes named after the twelve sons of Jacob.

The Firstborn Sons

13 Then the Lord said to Moses, "I want you to dedicate to Me the firstborn son in every family. They all belong to Me because I passed over them in Egypt, and they did not die."

3. Then Moses said to the people, "Never forget this day. It's the day the Lord brought you out of Egypt and set you free. He did it in a very powerful way. That's why He set aside a whole week for us to remember what He did for us.

4. "This is the first month of our new calendar and the beginning of our new year.

5. "The Lord will bring you back home to Canaan and will give you the land that He promised to Abraham. When you get to that beautiful land, you are to keep the Passover every year, just as you're doing now.

6-7. "For one week you are to eat unleavened bread, because that is a special week for you. During that time there should be no yeast in your houses.

8. "And when your children ask why you're doing this, tell them how the Lord set you free from slavery and brought you out of the land of Egypt.

9. "Tell them that this special week is to help you remember what the Lord has done for you. It's like a string around your finger so you won't forget. Also, it will help you remember to listen to the Lord. He will help you,

just as He did when He brought you out of Egypt.

10. "So always keep the Passover. It will be a blessing to you.

11-12. "After the Lord brings you into the land of Canaan, as He promised, He wants you to dedicate the firstborn son of every family to Him and set aside the firstborn of every animal as a sacrifice.

13. "Some animals such as the donkey are unclean. Their firstborn are not to be used as offerings. The Lord will give your firstborn son back to you; all you need to do is to bring Him an offering in exchange.

14. "When your son asks what his offering is for, tell him about your time in Egypt and how the Lord delivered you and spared the life of all your firstborn sons.

15. "Tell him how stubborn the king was until all the firstborn sons in Egypt died, including his own, then how he let you go. But the firstborn sons of the Hebrews did not get sick and die. That's why our firstborn sons belong to the Lord in a special way.

16. "So keep this special week every year. It will be like a string tied around your finger or even like something tied to your head to remind you what God has done for you."

Leaving Egypt

17. When the Hebrews left Egypt, the Lord didn't take them the short way, because that would have been harder for them. He didn't want them to get discouraged. He took them the long way around.

18. So the people went through the Red Sea into the wilderness. They were all well organized and traveled in columns according to their tribes.

19. Moses took the body of Joseph from Egypt as Joseph's brothers had

promised, so he could be buried in his own country.

20-22. The Hebrews were now free, and they gladly followed the Lord's leading. During the day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud, which shaded them from the sun. At night the cloud turned into a pillar of fire, which kept them warm and gave them light. So the Lord was with them day and night.

Crossing the Red Sea

14 One day the Lord said to Moses, "Tell the people to set up camp by the Red Sea and stay there.

3-4. "The king will think you got lost and don't know where to go. He'll come after you to take you back to Egypt. He'll come with horses and chariots, but I will defeat the king and his army. Then the people of Egypt will know that I am the God of heaven and earth." So Moses and the children of Israel did as they were told.

5. When the king heard that the Hebrews were camped by the Red Sea, he went after them. He said to his officials, "We will bring those Hebrews back, because we need them to work for us."

6-7. So the king got in his royal chariot, took 600 of his army chariots with their officers and men, and took off after the Hebrews.

8-9. The Lord didn't stop him, but let him come after the children of Israel. The king caught up with them by the Red Sea.

10-11. When the Israelites saw him coming after them with horses and chariots, they were terrified. They cried to the Lord for help and screamed at Moses, "Did you bring us out here to be killed? Look at what you've done! You've gotten us trapped!

12. "Didn't we tell you that the king would come after us? It would have been better to stay in Egypt as slaves than to come out here and be killed!"

13-14. Moses replied calmly, "Don't be afraid. See what God will do to save you. He will deliver you from the king. You'll never see him or his troops again. The Lord will fight for you; just watch."

15. Then Moses prayed and asked the Lord to do something. The Lord said, "This is not the time for you to stop and pray. This is a time for action. Tell the people to break camp and move toward the Red Sea.

16. "When you get there, point your shepherd's rod over the water. The sea will open up to make a way for the people to walk across on dry ground.

17-18. "The king will also try to cross. But I will defeat him and his troops with their horses and chariots. Then everyone will know that I am the God of heaven and earth. They will see that I destroyed the king and his troops without a fight."

19-20. Then the Lord's cloud moved back between them and the king's army. It was a wall of darkness on the side of the king and a wall of light on the side of the Hebrews. All night the cloud flooded the camp of God's people with light so they could finish getting ready to go.

21. When they got to the edge of the Red Sea, Moses pointed his shepherd's rod over the water. The Lord sent a strong wind that blew the waters apart.

22. Then under the light of the cloud, the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry ground. Walls of water were on both sides.

23. By morning they had all crossed over. Then the cloud lifted and moved in front of the people. When

the king saw that the water had separated, he took his troops and charged after the Hebrews.

24-25. Then the cloud turned into a pillar of fire. Lightning flashed, thunder crashed, and the earth shook. The king and his officers were afraid. They yelled, "Let's get out of here! The God of heaven is helping these people!" They tried to turn their horses and chariots around, but couldn't. The water began to seep up from below and turn the ground into mud. The king and his chariots got stuck.

26. Then God said to Moses, "Take your shepherd's rod and point it over the water. The sea will close up over the king and his troops."

27. Moses did as he was told. The wind stopped, and the huge walls of water came crashing down on the king and his army.

28. The waters completely covered them, and they all drowned, including the horses. Not one man survived, not even the king.

29-30. But the Hebrews were all safe on the other side, because the Lord had saved them from the king and his men.

31. When the children of Israel saw what had happened, they were awed by God's great power and put their faith in Him and in Moses His servant.

The Song of Moses

15 Then Moses and the people sang this song: "We will sing to the Lord. He has triumphed over the king. He has defeated our enemies with water.

2. "The Lord is our strength. He is our song and our salvation. He is our God, and we will praise Him. He is the God of Abraham, and we will exalt Him.

3-5. "The Lord is a great warrior. Jehovah is His name. He sent the king and his army into the sea and de-

feated them there. The water buried their horses and chariots.

6-8. "Your right arm, O Lord, is powerful. You have defeated the king. You threw down those who were against us. You defeated them as easily as fire consumes straw. You sent the wind, and the water piled up on each side of us. But the ground was dry.

9. "The king said, 'I will go after the Hebrews and bring them back. We will take back what we have given them.'

10. "But just one word from You, O Lord, and the wind stopped. The water came down on their heads.

11-13. "Lord, who is like You? The idols of Egypt cannot do this. They don't have such awesome power. You stretched out Your right arm, and our enemies were gone. You kept Your promise and rescued us. We know You will guide us to the Promised Land.

14-16. "The people in the land of Canaan will hear about this. They will shake with fear. Their leaders will lose courage and won't know what to do. They will hear about Your power. They will stand as still as a rock as we pass by.

17-18. "You will bring us into the land of Canaan. You will fulfill Your promise to Abraham. You will bring us to the mountain where Your Temple will be built. You will be with us and rule over us forever!"

19. This was the song the men of Israel sang after the king with his horses and chariots rushed down onto the seabed and the Lord brought the water crashing down on them. But the Hebrews had walked across on dry ground!

The Chorus of Miriam

20-21. Then God called Miriam, Aaron's sister, to be a leader and a prophetess. As the men sang the Song

of Moses, she led the women to sing this chorus: "Let us sing to the Lord, for He was victorious. He defeated the king. He threw the horses and riders into the sea."

Another Miracle

22. From the Red Sea the children of Israel went on toward Mount Sinai. After three days they ran out of water.

23. Then they saw a place with lots of trees and ran to the springs of water. But when they tasted the water, it was so bitter they couldn't drink it.

24. They got angry and yelled at Moses, "What are we supposed to do? Die of thirst?"

25. Then Moses prayed and asked the Lord what he should do. God showed him a tree and told him to cut it down and throw it into the lake. So that's what Moses did. As soon as the tree touched it, the water became sweet. The people had plenty to drink, including enough for their animals. The Lord was testing the people to see if they loved Him enough to trust Him.

26. The Lord said to Moses, "If you and the people will listen to Me and do what I say, I will keep you healthy and well. You will not have the sicknesses the Egyptians had. I'll take care of you because I love you."

27. Then the children of Israel went on their way and camped at a place that had springs and palm trees.

Bread From Heaven

16 After several days of traveling, the children of Israel came to a place about halfway to Sinai.

2-3. Again they complained to Moses and Aaron about bringing them out of Egypt. They said to Moses, "We shouldn't have listened to you and come out here. It would have been bet-

ter to die in Egypt than to come out here and die of hunger. In Egypt we had to work hard, but at least we had plenty to eat. But out here there's nothing!"

4. The Lord said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven. Every morning they should go and get the bread, but just enough for one day. I will test them to see if they love Me enough to obey Me.

5. "On the morning of the sixth day they should get enough for two days, for that day and for the Sabbath."

6. Then Moses and Aaron said to the people, "This evening something will begin to happen to let you know without a doubt that the Lord is the one who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

7. "Tomorrow morning you will see the glory of the Lord. You've been complaining against the Lord, not us.

8. "The Lord will give you bread from heaven, as much as you want to eat. He has heard you complain and has paid attention to what you have said. Your complaints were not against us, but against Him."

9. Then Moses turned to Aaron and said, "Tell the people to come out of their tents and stand before the Lord. He has heard their complaints and will answer their prayers."

10. As Aaron was calling people out of their tents, a bright light appeared in the distance. They saw a fire inside the pillar of cloud and knew it was the glory of the Lord.

11-12. Then the Lord said to Moses, "I have heard the complaints of the people. Tell them that this evening they will have all the meat they want. And in the morning they'll have bread from heaven. Then they will know who I am."

13. That evening a huge flock of quails flew into the camp. And the

next morning there was a heavy dew on the ground.

14. When the sun came up and the dew disappeared, something small and round, about the size of a pea, was on the ground. And when the people tasted it, it tasted like bread and honey.

15-16. The people looked at it and asked, "What is it?" Moses answered, "It's the bread from heaven that the Lord promised you. You can eat it as is or make it into flour to bake or cook it. But be sure to gather only enough for today."

17-18. The people did as they were told. Some picked up more and others less. But when they got home, they all had just what they needed for their families.

19. Then Moses said, "You don't need to save any of it. Tomorrow you can get some more."

20. Some people didn't believe him and tried to keep the leftovers for the next day, but by morning the bread had spoiled and didn't smell good.

21. Every morning there was dew on the ground and with it the bread from heaven. The people went out to pick up what they needed. When the sun got hot, what was left melted away. This happened every day.

22. On the sixth day the people gathered twice as much. Then some of the tribal leaders went to tell Moses about it.

23-24. He replied, "This is what the Lord wants you to do. Get what you need for today and tomorrow. Today you need to cook or bake, because tomorrow is the Sabbath. The extra will not spoil." And that's what happened. The extra the people got did not spoil.

25-26. Sabbath morning Moses said to the people, "Eat what you prepared yesterday, because there will be no bread from heaven today. Every day

there has been bread from heaven, but not today, because the Lord gave you twice as much yesterday."

27. Some of the people didn't believe Moses and went out Sabbath morning to get some, but it wasn't there.

28. Then the Lord said to Moses, "How much longer will some of these people refuse to keep My commandments?"

29. "I gave them twice as much yesterday so they could keep the Sabbath and not have to cook and bake. This is the day they need to rest from work and think about Me and what I have done for them."

30. So the people rested from their work and worshiped the Lord as He asked them to.

31. The children of Israel called this bread manna, meaning "What is it?" It looked like a little yellow-and-white pea and was crisp and sweet.

32. Moses said to the tribal leaders, "The Lord wants us to save some manna and keep it as a reminder of what He has done for us by bringing us out of Egypt."

33. Then Moses told Aaron to take a container, fill it with manna, and keep it until they built the sanctuary. Then they would put it there for safekeeping.

34. So that's what Aaron did. He went and filled the container with manna and kept it until he could put it in the sanctuary.

35. Year after year the Lord gave the children of Israel bread from heaven until they settled in the land of Canaan.

36. The manna that Aaron saved was about two quarts, and it never spoiled.

Water From a Rock

17 The Hebrews followed the pillar of cloud and camped wherever the Lord told them to. One day they came to a place

where they expected to find water, but there was none.

2. Then they complained to Moses, "It's all your fault. We need water now!" Moses answered, "The Lord is the one who guided us here. Let's tell Him our problem."

3. But the people didn't want to wait to pray. They asked, "Why did you take us out of Egypt, anyway? Are you going to let us die of thirst?"

4. Then Moses asked the Lord, "What should I do? These people are so mad they're ready to kill me."

5. The Lord replied, "Take a few of the leaders and motion for the people to follow you. And take your shepherd's rod."

6. "I'll go ahead of you and stand on a big rock near one of the mountains. When you get there, hit that rock one time with your shepherd's rod, and water will come out." Moses did what the Lord said, and as soon as he hit the rock, water gushed out, enough for all the people.

7. Moses called the place "Complaining," because that's where the people questioned whether the Lord was with them or not.

The Children of Israel Attacked

8. As the children of Israel were on their way to the next place, they were attacked by one of the desert tribes.

9. Then Moses said to Joshua, "We have to defend ourselves. Pick out your strongest men, because tomorrow morning we must fight back. I'll stand on top of the hill with my shepherd's rod and pray for you."

10. Joshua did as Moses said. By morning he and his men were ready and went out to fight. Then Moses took Aaron and Hur, his brother-in-law, to the top of the hill to pray.

11-13. As long as Moses prayed, the

Israelites would win. But when he stopped, they would lose. So when Moses got tired of holding up his hands while praying, Aaron and Hur had him sit on a rock, and they held up his hands. By evening the battle was over, and Joshua and his men had won.

14. Then God told Moses, "Write down everything so the people don't forget what happened today. Also tell Joshua that the desert people who attacked you need to be completely defeated, or they'll attack you and others again."

15-16. After this Moses built an altar to the Lord to celebrate the victory and called the place The Lord Is Our Flag. He said to the people, "Our enemies attacked us, but the Lord heard our prayers and gave us the victory."

Jethro Visits Moses

18 When Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, heard about all the things that God had done for the Hebrews and how He had brought them out of Egypt, he decided to visit Moses.

2-5. Moses' wife and his two sons also came along. Moses hadn't seen them for a long time. His first son's name was Gershom, and his second son's name was Eliezer. They found out that Moses and the children of Israel were camping near Mount Sinai.

6-7. Jethro sent word that he was coming and that Moses' wife and two sons were with him. Then Moses went out to meet them. He was so glad to see his wife, Zipporah, and his two boys. They hugged and kissed each other, and he brought them into the camp.

8. He told them everything that had happened since he had left them—how the king had refused to let the

Hebrews go, and what the Lord had done to set them free.

9. After they heard all that had taken place, they praised the Lord for the wonderful things He had done for His people.

10-11. Jethro said, "We are so happy for you and for the people. We can't praise God enough for setting you free and saving you from the king's army. This shows that God is stronger than all the idols in Egypt."

12. Then Jethro took a lamb and offered it to the Lord in thanksgiving for all He had done for Israel. He invited Moses and the tribal leaders to join him in worship and to eat a sacred meal together.

13. The next morning Moses went to work to help people with their problems. He was kept busy from morning until night.

14. When Jethro saw this, he told Moses, "You can't solve all these problems on your own. You need some help. Look at all the people standing in line to see you. That much work will kill you!"

15-16. Moses replied, "The people want to obey the Lord and need to know what to do. How can I turn them away? And when they disagree about something, they come to me to help settle it and tell them what's right and what isn't."

17-18. Jethro said, "What you're doing for the people isn't wrong, but doing all this by yourself isn't right either. First of all, you're going to wear yourself out, and second, the people are not going to keep standing in these long lines to see you.

19-20. "Let me give you some advice. It's good that you're helping people, and God will bless you for it. And yes, you need to teach them what God expects of them.

21. "But you can't do this alone. You need to pick out some men you can trust to help you. Put some in charge of ten people, others in charge of fifty, and still others in charge of 100 or 1,000.

22-23. "They can solve some of the easier problems and leave only the harder ones for you. That way you won't wear yourself out, and the people won't have to stand in such long lines."

24-25. Moses listened to his father-in-law and decided to follow his advice. He picked men he could trust and made them judges. He put some in charge of small groups of people and some in charge of larger groups.

26-27. So these men took care of the easier problems, and Moses took care of the harder ones. Then Jethro said goodbye to Moses and went back home.

At Mount Sinai

19 It took the children of Israel two months to get from Egypt to Mount Sinai. There they set up a more permanent camp.

3-4. Then the Lord asked Moses to come up the mountain to see Him. When he got there, the Lord said, "This is what I want you to tell the children of Israel for Me: You saw what I did to set you free from Egypt, and how I have taken care of you.

5-6. "If you will love Me and keep My commandments, then you'll continue to be My special people. You'll be like a whole nation of priests to help Me reach the world."

7. So Moses went back down, called the elders together, and told them what the Lord had said.

8. The elders replied, "Whatever the Lord wants us to do, we will do." And the people said the same thing. So Moses went back up the mountain and told the Lord.

9. God said, "I will come close to you, in a cloud, and the people will hear Me speaking to you. Then they'll no longer question your leadership." Moses answered, "Lord, You are our king. The elders and the people have agreed on that."

10-11. The Lord instructed, "Go back down and tell the people to prepare themselves for worship. They should wash their clothes and get ready for Me to speak to them. The day after tomorrow I will come down on this mountain, and everyone will know it."

12. "Mark a boundary around the mountain. Tell the people not to cross it and try to come up to see Me. If they do, they will die."

13. "If anyone doesn't take this warning seriously and starts to cross the boundary, no one should go after him. They should throw stones at him or shoot arrows at him to stop him. If he dies, they can come after his body later. Only after they hear the long blast of a trumpet may they cross the boundary."

14-15. Then Moses went back down and told the people what the Lord had said. So the people washed their clothes and prepared for worship. Moses also told them that men and women should stay in separate groups for three days.

16. On the morning of the third day a thick cloud covered the top of the mountain. Soon lightning and thunder started, followed by a loud blast that sounded like a trumpet. The people were so scared they shook.

17-18. Then Moses led the people from the camp to the foot of the mountain. Soon the dark cloud covered the whole mountain, and the top of it was on fire. The smoke went straight up into the sky, and the mountain began to shake.

19-20. The sound of the trumpet got louder and louder, and then suddenly it stopped, as did the lightning and thunder. Everything was dead quiet. Moses spoke to the Lord, and God told him to come back up the mountain into the cloud and the fire because He wanted to talk to him.

21-22. When Moses got up there, the Lord said, "You need to go back down because some of the people want to cross the boundary and come up to see Me. Tell them not to do that. That includes the elders. They should not think that they can do what you did."

23. Moses objected, "Lord, I told the people not to cross the boundary. They know better than to do that."

24. The Lord insisted. "I want you to go down to tell them again. Then bring Aaron back with you. No one else is to come up here."

25. So Moses went back down and told the people what the Lord had said and that He really meant it.

The Ten Commandments

20 Then God spoke from the top of the mountain to Moses and the people, "I am the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt and set you free. You are My people."

3. "Don't love anything more than Me. Put Me first in everything you do."

4-6. "Don't make images of things in heaven or on earth and worship them. Others will think there's power in those images. That's a bad influence on them and their children. But set a good example; then I will bless you and all those who worship Me."

7. "Don't misuse My name by cursing or in any other way. Respect Me."

8-11. "Remember to keep the Sabbath holy. Six days are for you to work, and one day is for Me. I don't want you to

work on that day. I made the sky, the earth, and the seas in six days and rested the seventh day. I blessed the Sabbath and made it special.

12. "Don't dishonor your parents. Respect them, and I will bless you for it.

13. "Don't murder anyone.

14. "Don't be unfaithful in marriage.

15. "Don't steal.

16. "Don't lie.

17. "Don't be greedy in wanting what someone else has."

18. Then the lightning and thunder began again, followed by loud blasts from a trumpet. The mountain began to smoke. People were so scared that they backed away from it.

19. They begged Moses, "Don't let God speak to us. Let Him speak to you, and we promise to listen and obey. We're afraid that if God speaks to us again, we'll die!"

20. Moses said, "Don't be afraid of God. He loves you. He talked to you this way to let you know how terrible sin is. These ten simple laws will help you know what it means to be good."

21. Then Moses went back up the mountain, right into the cloud and fire where God was.

22. God loved Moses and said to him, "When we finish talking, I want you to go back down and remind the people that I am the God of heaven and earth. They heard Me speak from this mountain.

23. "They must not make images of gold or silver. I mean it. It will take their hearts away from Me.

24. "I want them to make a simple altar out of stones and offer their lambs on it as they worship Me. They should do this wherever they go, and I will bless them for it.

25. "When they build this kind of altar, don't hammer the stones to make them fit. Use them just as they

are. This will remind them that I am the one shaping them for heaven. They can't do it themselves.

26. "Don't make the altar so high that they'll need steps to get up there, because I don't want them to see each other's naked legs."

How to Treat Others

21 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Help the children of Israel to understand what the Ten Commandments are all about.

2. "If a man helps another man get out of debt on the condition that the man becomes his servant, the first man should not think that he owns him. He can be a servant for only six years at the most. The seventh year he's to go free, whether he's worked off his debt or not.

3. "If he came alone, he is to leave alone. If he was married and his family came with him, then his family goes with him.

4. "If he came alone and then married one of the female servants, he can't take her with him when he leaves.

5-6. "If he likes working for the man and wants to stay, he should let the owner put a little hole in his earlobe as a mark to show that he wants to stay.

7. "If a father accepts money for his daughter to be someone's servant, she belongs to that family. She is not to be let go after six years as the man working off his debt is.

8. "If the man isn't happy with her work, he has no right to accept money for her to be someone else's servant. That would break the agreement.

9-11. "If the son of the man she works for loves her and wants to marry her, and she agrees, then the man should treat her as a daughter. If the son changes his mind and doesn't marry her, the man must not treat her as a

servant again. If the man does, she can go back home for free.

12. "If a man hits someone with the intention of killing him and he dies, the man who did it has to pay for it with his life.

13. "If he hits someone accidentally and the man dies, he needs to move to a protected area so the man's family doesn't turn around and kill him.

14. "But if he intentionally kills someone and runs to the protected area, he can be arrested and be put to death for what he has done.

15. "If anyone beats his parents, he should be arrested and receive the death sentence.

16. "If a man kidnaps someone and makes him his slave or sells him as a slave, he should be put to death.

17. "If anyone curses his parents, he should be put to death.

18-19. "If two men get into a fight and one hits the other one with a rock and he ends up in bed, the man who hit him must pay all medical expenses and for the loss of the man's time. Since the injured man didn't die, the man who hit him should not be punished.

20-21. "If a man beats a servant and he dies, the man must be punished for what he did. But if in a day or two the servant is well, the man should not be punished, because the servant belongs to him.

22. "If men get into a fight and a pregnant woman watching the fight accidentally gets hurt and the baby comes early, the man who hit her has to go to court and pay.

23. "But if the woman is hurt and the baby also is hurt or perhaps dies, the man who hit her has to go to court, even if he has to pay for it with his life.

24-25. "If someone hurts someone else's eye, knocks out his tooth, or injures his hand, the same should be

done to him. This means a wound for a wound and a bruise for a bruise.

26-27. "If a man hits his servant and the servant loses his eye, the man is to let his servant go free. Even if the man only knocks out a servant's tooth, he is to let him go free.

28-29. "If a bull unexpectedly charges someone and kills him, the bull should be killed. If the owner knew that his bull was dangerous and the bull kills someone, the bull should be killed, and the owner should be taken to court and charged with murder.

30-31. "If the judge decided that the man should pay only for what his bull did, it should be enough to equal the value of the dead person's life. The same rule applies if a bull kills a boy or girl.

32. "If the bull kills a servant, the bull's owner should pay the man for the loss of his servant, and the bull should be killed.

33-34. "If a man digs a pit and doesn't cover it and an animal falls in and dies, he must pay the owner for the value of the animal.

35. "If a man's bull kills another man's bull, the bad bull should be killed and sold for meat, and the men should divide the money.

36. "But if the owner of the bad bull was told how dangerous his animal was and he didn't do anything about it, he should give the owner of the dead bull another bull in its place.

Protecting Property

22 "If a man steals a cow or a sheep and kills it or sells it, he has to pay five cows and four sheep for the one he stole.

2. "If a thief breaks into a house at night and the owner fights for his life and kills him, the owner is not guilty.

3. "If a thief breaks into a house dur-

ing the day and does not threaten the owner, but the owner kills him, the owner is guilty. If a thief breaks into a house, he is to pay back what he stole, and if he can't, he is to be sold as a slave.

4. "If a thief is caught with an animal that he stole, he'll have to give the animal back, plus two more animals.

5. "If a man lets his animals go into someone else's field and they eat the neighbor's crops, he has to give him some of his own crops.

6. "If a man starts a fire to burn some weeds and the fire spreads and burns another man's crops, he is to pay for the damages.

7. "If a man asks his neighbor to take care of some of his valuables and the neighbor agrees, but a thief breaks in and steals them, when he is caught he has to pay double.

8. "If the thief is not caught, the neighbor has to go to court and prove that he didn't take the valuables and hide them.

9. "Conflicting claims have to go to court. And the one who is found guilty has to pay double.

10-11. "If a man asks his neighbor to watch his animals and the neighbor agrees, but an animal dies, is hurt, or is stolen, the neighbor must prove to the court that he didn't do it.

12. "If someone stole the man's animal, the neighbor has to pay the owner for the animal because he wasn't watching it as he should have.

13. "If the animal was killed by wild animals, the neighbor should bring some evidence to show what happened.

14-15. "If a man borrows an animal and it gets hurt or dies, he must pay the owner for it. If the owner was there when it happened, the man does not have to pay for it.

16-17. "If a man forces a girl to sleep

with him, he must pay her parents for what he has done to her. If he wants to marry her, but her father refuses, the man still must pay.

18-20. "Do not allow anyone who practices witchcraft to live. The same goes for anyone who abuses an animal, kills it for fun, or sacrifices it to idols or demons.

21. "Don't mistreat a foreigner. Remember how you were treated in Egypt.

22-24. "Don't take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry to Me for help, I will hear their prayers. And I will let war come to your country, and many of your husbands and fathers will be killed.

25-27. "If you lend money to someone very poor, do not charge interest on the loan. If the poor man offers his coat as a pledge to repay the loan, do not take it, because the poor man will need it to keep warm. If he cries to Me for help because he's cold, I'll not forget it.

28. "Don't swear at a leader, a judge, or a king, and don't curse them.

29-30. "The firstborn son in each family belongs to Me. So do the firstborn animals from your herds and flocks. The animals can stay with their mothers for seven days, but then bring them to Me.

31. "I want you to be a healthy people. So don't eat meat from animals that have been killed by wild animals. Give that to the dogs.

Being Fair

23 "Don't say something about others that isn't true. Don't lie about a man, no matter how much someone offers to pay you.

2. "Don't do everything you see others do. When people ask questions, tell the truth.

3. "Don't lie about a man to keep him from going to jail just because he's poor.

4. "If you see a cow or a donkey wander off, get it and take it back to the owner.

5. "If you see someone's donkey fall down, even if you don't like the owner, stop and help him.

6. "Always be fair to everyone, rich or poor.

7. "Don't blame someone else for something you did. And don't lie about someone to get him arrested just because you don't like him. I won't forget that.

8. "Don't take money from someone who wants you to be a witness. If you do, you might twist the truth.

9. "Never mistreat someone from a foreign country. Remember how you were treated when you were in Egypt.

A Sabbath for the Land

10-11. "Sow your crops and harvest your fields for six years. The seventh year, let the land rest. Don't sow anything or harvest anything that grew by itself. Leave that for poor people and for the animals.

12. "You need to rest too. Do all your work in six days and rest on the Sabbath. This will give your animals and servants a chance to rest too.

13. "Do everything I ask you to do. Don't copy other people by worshipping idols. Don't even talk about idols, or you'll be tempted to pray to them.

Religious Festivals

14. "There are three religious festivals that I want you to keep.

15. "At the beginning of each year, keep the Passover and the Festival of Bread, just as you did when you left Egypt. For one week, eat only unleavened bread. And don't forget to bring an offering.

16. "Next is the Festival of Harvest. On that day, bring Me a sample of the

first of your harvest. And at the end of harvesting for the year, observe the Festival of Ingathering.

17. "These three festivals are important, so be sure to keep them. All men shall come and worship Me at those times.

18. "Bring only unleavened bread with an animal offering. Meat should not be kept until the next day, or it will spoil.

19. "When you bring a harvest offering, bring the best, because I'm giving My best for you. Don't cook meat in milk, as the pagans do. They think it's magic to make them strong, but it's the devil's trick.

God's Special Angel

20. "My Son will protect you as an angel would. He will bring you into the land I promised to give you.

21-22. "When you obey Him, you're obeying Me. If you don't, He can't forgive you until you repent and change your ways. If you obey Him, then He can continue to protect you and fight your enemies. Remember that I am against those who are against you.

23. "My Son will bring you into the land I promised to give to you. Those who fight against you will be destroyed.

24. "When you come into the land, don't do what the people there are doing. If you find their idols, destroy them.

25-26. "If you continue to love Me, I will bless you and take away all your sickness. Babies will not die as soon as they're born, and everyone will live until they're very old.

27-28. "I will make your enemies afraid of you. When they do attack, they'll suddenly get scared and run. If necessary, I'll send hornets ahead of you to drive out the people.

29-30. "I won't do this in one year,

because if I did, some of the land would be empty and animals would come in and take over. So I'll do it one step at a time.

31. "Slowly and over time I will expand your borders from Egypt in the south to the Euphrates River in the north, from the Mediterranean in the west to the Arabian Desert in the east.

32. "Don't make agreements with your enemies, because they're controlled by demons through idol worship.

33. "Don't let anyone bring idols into the country, or you'll get curious and want to worship them, to see if they're real. You'll get caught up in witchcraft and then turn against Me."

24 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go back down the mountain and tell the people everything I've said. Next time, bring Aaron, his two sons, and the seventy leaders partway up with you.
2. "Then I want you to come up all the way to the top, as you did before. The people should stay away from the mountain, as they have been told. I don't want them to get hurt."

3. So Moses went down and told the people everything that God had said. The people responded, "Everything the Lord has said, we will do!"

4. Then Moses wrote down everything God had said. Early the next morning he built an altar at the foot of the mountain. He set up twelve stone pillars, one for each tribe of Israel.

5. Next he picked out the twelve young men who were firstborn sons to be priests and had them offer sacrifices to the Lord.

6. Moses caught some of the blood in a basin and poured half of it against the foot of the altar as a sign of the promise that the people had made to God.

7. Then he took what he had just writ-

ten and read it to the people. When they heard it all the second time, they said, "Everything the Lord has said, we will do!"

8. Next Moses took the basin and sprinkled some of the blood toward the people. Then he poured the rest on the ground in front of them. He said, "This blood represents the promise you made to God and the promise He has made to you. The covenant between God and us is now sealed."

9-11. Then Moses took Aaron with his two sons and the seventy leaders up the mountain. When they got halfway up, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and God gave them a glimpse of His glory. They saw God's feet on a blue platform made of precious stones. But the Lord did not harm them. They even ate a covenant meal surrounded by God's glory.

12. After Moses and the others came down, the Lord said to Moses, "Come back up the mountain to stay with Me. I will give you two stone tablets on which I'll write the Ten Commandments. I want you teach them to the people."

13-14. Moses got ready and, together with Joshua, headed up the mountain. Before they left, Moses said to the seventy leaders, "Wait here. If the people have any problems while we're gone, consult with Aaron and Hur, who'll be here with you."

15-16. About halfway up, a thick cloud covered the mountain. The Lord was in that cloud, which covered the mountain for six days, while they waited. On the seventh day the Lord called Moses to come up the rest of the way.

17. From down below, the mountain looked as if it were on fire.

18. Then Moses climbed to the top of the mountain and stayed there with God for forty days and nights.

Directions for Offerings

25 The Lord said to Moses, "When you go back down, talk to the people for Me. Tell them to bring Me an offering, as much or as little as they can afford.

3-7. "It can be gold, silver, or bronze. It can be blue, purple, red, or white cloth; or leather and acacia wood; or olive oil and incense; or precious stones of various kinds.

8-9. "Let them build me a sanctuary. I want you to supervise it to make sure that it's built exactly the way I tell you. It will be patterned after the sanctuary in heaven and measured differently from other things.

The Ark

10. "First, make a box of acacia wood, the same as the wood from the burning bush. The box will be called an ark and should be as long, wide, and high as I tell you.

11-13. "Cover it with gold inside and out. Make four large gold rings and attach them to the four corners. Make two carrying poles and cover them with gold.

14-15. "The poles should always stay in the rings even when the golden box is set down. That's why rings are attached to the bottom corners of the ark.

16-17. "I am going to give you two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them to put inside the ark. And make a golden lid for the ark, which will be called a mercy seat.

18-20. "Make two golden angels and attach one at each end of the lid. They should face each other with heads bowed. One of their wings should stretch across the lid, and the other wing should fold over their body.

21-22. "After you put the two stone tablets inside the ark, put the lid

holding the angels on top of it. The lid is the mercy seat, and it's from there that I will give you instructions for My people.

The Table of Bread

23-25. "Also, I want them to make a table of acacia wood, exactly as long, wide, and high as I tell you. Cover it with gold and put a golden rim around the top. Then attach a crown molding of gold.

26-28. "Make four gold rings and put one on each corner and attach it to the top of the leg. The rings are for the poles to carry the table. Also make two poles out of acacia wood and cover them with gold.

29-30. "Make little gold plates, bowls, and pitchers. The table is for a special flat bread called The Bread of My Presence. Every week before the Sabbath it should be replaced with new bread.

The Seven-branched Lamp

31-32. "Also make a lamp and a heavy base out of pure gold. The stem of the lamp should have three curved branches on each side. The whole thing should be formed into one large piece of gold.

33-36. "Each branch and the stem should be decorated with four gold flowers. The stem should have one flower by each branch and one on the top. Each flower must be part of the golden stem.

37-38. "Make seven little gold bowls to hold oil, and put one on the end of each branch and one on top of the stem. When the lamps are lit, they will light up the Holy Place for you. Make a gold wick trimmer and tongs to cut the wicks and handle the hot bowls.

39. "You will need about seventy-five pounds of gold for the lamp and everything that goes with it.

40. "Be sure to follow the pattern of the heavenly sanctuary that I showed you, and make everything exactly as I have told you here on the mountain.

The Sanctuary

26 "For the sanctuary tent, make ten white curtains with blue, purple, and red designs and figures of angels for the tent ceiling. All the curtains are to be the same size.

3-6. "Sew five of them together to make one large piece and then the other five the same way. Make fifty blue loops for each piece. Make fifty gold hooks for each loop to hold the two large pieces together.

7-9. "Then make three roof coverings. The first should be made of goat's hair from eleven small pieces, all the same size. Sew five of them together for one larger piece and six for the other.

10-12. "Make fifty loops for each large set and fifty bronze hooks to hold them together. The larger piece is to cover the front of the tent, and the other will cover the back.

13-14. "Each of the three roof coverings should be large enough for the whole tent. The first one should hang over the sides. The other two should be fastened to the tent stakes. The second roof covering should be made from sheepskin dyed red. The top covering should be made of soft leather.

15-21. "Next, make forty wall frames out of acacia wood, twenty each for the north and south sides of the sanctuary tent. Each frame should be the same size. Then make eighty silver feet, two for each frame.

22-25. "Then make six wall frames and two corner frames for the back of the tent, and sixteen silver feet, two for each frame.

26-30. "After that, make ten long rods

out of acacia wood, five for each side of the tent to hold the wall frames together. Cover the frames and the rods with gold and attach gold rings to the frames to hold the rods in place. Erect the sanctuary as I showed you.

31-32. "Make a large white curtain, with blue and red designs and figures of angels. Make gold hooks for the curtain and hang it on four pillars made out of acacia wood. Cover these pillars with gold and set each one in a silver base. This curtain will separate the two parts of the sanctuary.

33-34. "Behind this curtain, put the ark holding the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them. This part of the tent will be called the Most Holy Place. Then put the lid with its angels on top of the ark and close it up.

35. "The larger area on the other side of the curtain will be called the Holy Place. The table with the bread will be on the north side and the seven-branched lamp will be on the south side.

36-37. "Make a white curtain with blue, purple, and red designs for the entrance to the Holy Place. Make gold hooks for the curtain and hang it on five pillars made of acacia wood and covered with gold, each standing in a copper base.

The Altar

27 "Next, I want the people to make a huge square altar out of acacia wood to be used for sacrifices, and place it in the courtyard. Make it according to the measurements I've given you. Attach a horn on each of the corners and cover the altar with copper.

3-5. "The shovels, pots, bowls, forks, and pans needed for sacrifices should be made out of copper. Make a heavy copper screen with four rings and

hang it halfway down inside the altar.

6-8. "Also make two carrying poles for the altar out of acacia wood and cover them with copper. The altar itself should be made out of wood but covered with thick copper plates, as I showed you.

9-12. "Have the people make white curtains as a fence to go all around the sanctuary and the courtyard. Hang the curtains on silver hooks from wooden posts covered with copper. The top of the posts should be silver and should stand in copper bases. Make twenty posts for each side of the sanctuary and ten for the back.

13-16. "The entrance to the sanctuary will face east. On this end of the sanctuary will be four posts with a curtain. For the entrance itself, make a large white curtain with blue, purple, and red designs. Hang them on the posts.

17-18. "All the posts around the sanctuary should be connected with silver rods from which to hang the curtains. The outside of the sanctuary with the courtyard will be 180 feet long and ninety feet wide, and the curtain fence will be nine feet high.

19. "The utensils needed for the sanctuary, including the tent pegs, will be of copper.

20-21. "Tell the people to bring Me the best olive oil for the seven-branched lamp. Aaron and his sons should keep the seven-branched lamp burning day and night. It should never go out.

The Priests

28 "Set Aaron and his three sons apart as priests because I have called them to the ministry.

2-3. "Make special clothes for Aaron. I have given wisdom to those who make clothes, so they will know how to do it.

4-5. "Make white underwear, a white robe with long sleeves, and a short blue robe with short sleeves. Also make a vest for him to wear on top of the short robe, an embroidered sash, a breastpiece to hang over his chest, and a white turban. Use the best cloth and gold, blue, purple, and red thread.

6-8. "The same colorful material should be used for the vest. It is called an ephod and should have a front and back part joined at the shoulders. The embroidered belt should match the vest.

9-10. "Then the craftsmen should engrave the names of the twelve tribes on two precious stones. The names of the six oldest sons of Jacob should be on the stone for Aaron's right shoulder, and the names of the six youngest sons on the stone for his left shoulder.

11-12. "Each stone should be carefully mounted on the vest to represent the twelve tribes. In this way Aaron will carry My people on his shoulders when he comes to minister before Me.

13-16. "Attach two gold loops to the stones on Aaron's shoulders and tie a short golden cord to each loop. Hang the cloth breastpiece from the cords attached to the stones. The breastpiece should be one foot long and one foot wide.

17-21. "Then attach twelve small precious stones in four rows of three to the front of the breastpiece. The first row should have a ruby, topaz, and beryl. The second row, a turquoise, sapphire, and emerald. The third row, a jacinth, agate, and amethyst. The fourth row, a chrysolite, onyx, and jasper. Engrave the name of a tribe on each stone.

22-29. "Attach the two golden cords hanging from Aaron's shoulders to the rings on the upper corners of the

breastpiece. Tie a blue cord to the rings on the lower corners of the breastpiece; then tie the ribbon around his waist. This way the breastpiece will stay in place when he comes into My presence carrying the twelve tribes over his heart.

30. "Also attach one large stone to the right and left of the rows of little stones. These will be called the Urim and Thummim. I will use these stones to answer your questions. When the one on the right lights up, the answer is yes, and when the one on the left lights up, the answer is no.

31-34. "Aaron's short blue robe is to be one piece with a hole in the top for his head. The opening is to be reinforced so it will not tear. On the bottom of the robe hang blue, purple, and red balls that look like pomegranate fruit, with a golden bell between each one.

35. "Aaron should wear this robe whenever he comes into My presence. From the ringing of the little bells the people will be able to tell where he is as he moves in and out of the Holy Place.

36-39. "Make a gold headband with the words The Lord Is Holy on it for Aaron to wear when he comes into My presence. Attach a blue ribbon to each end of it so it can be tied in the back. This will hold the turban in place. The robe, the sash, and the turban should be made from the same material.

40-41. "Also make a long white robe, a colorful waistband, and a flat white turban for each of Aaron's three sons. Aaron and his sons must wear these special clothes when you ordain them to the ministry.

42-43. "They must always wear these robes and the white underwear when they come to minister before Me. This same rule applies to all priests who serve Me after Aaron and his sons die."

Aaron and His Sons Ordained

29 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Before you ordain Aaron and his three sons, pick out a young bull and two rams that are healthy and strong.

2-3. "Bake some unleavened bread made with olive oil and some wafers without oil. Bring the bread and wafers in a basket along with the three young animals.

4-9. "Have Aaron and his sons come into the sanctuary courtyard and wash their hands and feet. Aaron should wear his high priestly clothes. Then anoint his head with olive oil to ordain him for Me. Aaron's sons should wear their priestly clothes too. Ordain them as you did Aaron.

10-14. "Have Aaron and his sons put their hands on the head of the young bull and silently confess their sins to Me. Sacrifice the bull, put some blood on the horns of the altar, pour the rest out, and take the body outside the camp and burn it.

15-18. "Then have Aaron and his sons put their hands on the head of one of the rams and dedicate themselves to Me. Sacrifice the ram, pour the blood out, and burn the whole body on the altar. It's a sign of total consecration.

19-21. "Take the other ram and have Aaron and his sons put their hands on its head and sacrifice it. Put a little blood on their right ear, right thumb, and right big toe. Take some olive oil, mix it with a little blood, and sprinkle it on their priestly clothes to dedicate them to Me too.

22-25. "Before you burn the body of the ram on the altar, take some of the fat and bread and give them to Aaron to hold up as an offering to Me. Take them back and burn them on the altar.

26-28. "Then take some of the breast and shoulder meat, hold it up as an of-

fering to Me, then give it to Aaron and his sons. It is theirs. Burn the rest of the ram's body on the altar. These rules apply to all who become priests and to the peace offerings the people bring.

29-30. "These ceremonies should be passed on to the next priests. When Aaron dies and one of his sons becomes high priest, he is to wear these priestly clothes for seven days before beginning his ministry.

31-34. "The meat I gave to Aaron and his sons should be prepared in the courtyard and eaten together with the bread and the wafers. No one else should eat this; it is only for the priests. If any is left, it should be burned.

The Altar and Daily Offerings

35-37. "You should have this kind of service for Aaron and his sons each day for seven days. Also purify the altar with an offering for seven days and anoint it with oil. After that it will be holy, and no one is to touch it except the priests.

38-42. "Once the altar is dedicated, the priests should offer a lamb on it every morning and evening. Offer some bread and grape juice with each offering. This shows what I will do for you, so do this every day.

43-46. "My presence will make the sanctuary and the altar in the courtyard holy. I will be with My people and be their God, and they will be like My own children. They will know that I am the one who brought them out of Egypt and set them free. I have not forsaken them. I love them."

The Altar of Incense

30 The Lord continued to talk to Moses, saying, "Make a small altar out of acacia wood for burning incense.

2-3. "It should be a square with horns on each corner according to the measurements I gave you. Put gold molding around the top edge and cover the table with gold.

4-6. "Attach two gold rings to the opposite top corners for the two carrying poles. Make the poles out of acacia wood and cover them with gold. Place the altar in front of the curtain of the Most Holy Place.

7-10. "Every morning and evening Aaron or one of his sons should put fresh incense on the hot coals. Don't offer anything else on this altar. Once a year Aaron should put a touch of blood from the daily sacrifice on the tiny horns of the altar to keep it holy."

Money for the Sanctuary

11-16. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Every man twenty years old and up should bring the same thank offering to Me, whether he is rich or poor. The money is for keeping up the sanctuary so I can continue to live with you and protect you."

The Washbasin, Oil, and Incense

17-18. "Make a copper washbasin and set it in the courtyard between the altar of sacrifice and the entrance to the sanctuary. Then fill it with water.

19-21. "Aaron and his sons should wash their hands and feet before they come into the sanctuary. They should do the same before offering any sacrifices, because the courtyard and the sanctuary are holy. This rule is for all priests from now on. I will know if they don't do it."

22-25. The Lord continued, "Take some Eastern spices and add some olive oil to make a sweet-smelling anointing oil for priests to use in the sanctuary.

26-29. "They should use this oil to anoint the ark, the table of incense, the

table with the bread, and the seven-branched lampstand. Also they should anoint the washbasin and the altar of sacrifice in the courtyard. These things will then be holy, and no one is to touch them except the priests.

30-33. "Then anoint Aaron and his sons with this oil to set them apart for the priesthood. After this they can use this scented oil on themselves, but no one is to make it for himself or for anyone else. If they do, they must be separated from My people."

34-38. "Also I want you to take some spices and make a special incense. Add a little salt to it to keep it pure because it will be used in worship. Grind it into powder so it can be easily sprinkled on the hot coals of the altar of incense. No one is to make it for himself or for anyone else. If they do, they must be separated from My people."

Building the Sanctuary

31 Then the Lord said to Moses, "I have chosen a man from the tribe of Judah to help you build the sanctuary."

3-5. "I will give him knowledge and skill to be an artist and a craftsman. He will make the designs and work the gold, silver, and copper. He will also carve the wood and cut and set the precious stones."

6-9. "I have chosen a man from the tribe of Dan to be his assistant, and others to be helpers. I will give them knowledge and skill to make all the furniture for the sanctuary."

10-11. "They will make the priestly clothes for Aaron and his sons, the anointing oil, and the incense. Make sure they do everything the way I told you."

The Sabbath

12-13. "Tell the people not to forget

the Sabbath. It's a time for rest and worship. It's a sign between Me and them that they are My people."

14-15. "The Sabbath is holy, and anyone who breaks it by working on that day doesn't really love Me. There are six days for people to work. Anyone who breaks the Sabbath is disloyal and deserves to die."

16-17. "The Sabbath is a day for everyone to be happy because they are part of My family. It will help them to remember that in six days I made the heavens and the earth and rested on the seventh day, enjoying all the things I had made."

18. When God finished talking to Moses, He gave him the two stone tablets on which He had written the Ten Commandments with His own finger."

Aaron's Mistake

32 Moses was up in the mountain for 40 days. The leaders said to Aaron, "We don't know what has happened to Moses. Now what do we do? Why don't we make ourselves a god we can see?"

2-3. Aaron gave in. He said, "Tell your wives and daughters to take off their golden earrings and bring them to me." The leaders talked to the women, and they agreed."

4. Aaron took the earrings, melted them down, and made a statue of a young bull. Then the leaders said to the people, "Listen, this calf represents the God we can't see, the one who brought us out of Egypt and who will take us into the Promised Land!"

5. When Aaron saw how happy the people were, he built an altar in front of the calf and said, "Tomorrow we will celebrate our freedom. Bring your sacrifices, and we will offer them to a god we can see."

6. The next day they brought their sacrifices and offered them in front of the calf. They sat down to eat and drink, and then they danced and shouted for joy, hugging and kissing whomever they wanted to.

7-8. God saw everything that was going on. He said to Moses, "You need to go back down and stop what's happening. The people are worshipping a golden calf. They think it represents Me.

9-10. "I know how stubborn these people can be and how they think. One way for Me to solve this problem would be to destroy them and start a new people with you and your family. I could make you the father of a great nation."

11-12. Moses replied, "Lord, don't do that! The Egyptians saw how powerfully You brought Your people out of Egypt. They would say that You brought them out here just to destroy them. So don't do that. They would totally misunderstand the kind of God You are.

13. "You said that You would bless these people and bring them into the land You promised Abraham. If You destroyed them, people would think that You don't keep Your promises."

14. Moses realized that God was testing his love for the people to see how much he thought of them and God's reputation. The Lord was pleased with Moses' response, so He didn't do what He had said.

15-16. Then Moses went down the mountain carrying the stone tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments using His own finger.

17. Partway down, Moses picked up Joshua, and they went on down the mountain. At one place Joshua stopped and said, "It sounds like war down there!"

18. Moses said, "No, that's not the

sound of war, because no one's crying out in pain. It sounds like the shouts of pagan worship."

19. As they came near the camp, they could see the golden calf and the dancing. Moses became furious. He threw down the stone tablets so hard that they broke.

20. He stopped what was going on and had the people build a big fire. He threw the golden calf in and left it there until it melted. Then he had the leaders grind the gold into powder. He threw it into the water and made them drink it to show how powerless their calf god was.

21-22. Then he said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you? How did you let this happen?" Aaron said, "Don't be so upset. You know these people. They like to do their own thing.

23-24. "They said that they didn't know what had happened to you and God. They wanted a god they could see. I told them to bring their golden earrings. When I threw them into the fire, they melted together and made this golden calf."

25. Aaron's excuse did not make sense. As they were talking, Moses noticed that some of the people were acting wild and that no one could control them. He knew that if their enemies saw what was happening, it would give them a chance to attack.

26. So he shouted, "Those who refused to worship the golden calf come and stand by me. And those who did, but are sorry, come and stand here also." The whole tribe of Levi stood with Moses, and so did lots of people. But some were ready to fight.

27. Then Moses said to the Levites, "Take your swords and don't be afraid to fight. These people are fighting against the God of heaven, who just a few days ago spoke to them

from the mountain telling them that He loved them."

28. So the Levites did what Moses said. Lots of people got killed in the fighting, mostly the leaders who had started it all.

29. When it was over, Moses said to the Levites, "Your whole tribe was faithful to God and did not worship the golden calf. He will honor you for this by setting you aside for Himself."

30. The next day Moses said to the people, "Worshiping a golden calf is a terrible thing to do, but to say that it represented the God who brought you out of Egypt is disgusting. Let me go back up the mountain and ask the Lord to forgive you."

31-32. So Moses went back up and said to God, "Lord, these people committed a terrible sin by doing what they did. Please forgive them. But if You can't, then take my name out of Your book too."

33-34. The Lord said, "Whoever is against Me is the one whose name I will take out of My book. Everyone is responsible for their own sins, not someone else's. Go back down and tell the people to break camp, and I'll show them where to go next. But I still will discipline them for doing what they did."

35. Then the Lord let the people get sick to help them understand that what they had done was wrong.

Building the Sanctuary Delayed

33 God then said to Moses, "Break camp and start toward the land I promised to give Abraham. My Son will be like an angel to you. He will fight for you as He did for you when you were in Egypt.

3. "The land that I am taking you to is beautiful. But I will not camp with you in My sanctuary tent, because if the

people turn against Me again to worship idols, My presence would destroy them."

4-5. When the people heard this, they cried. The Lord also said, "You are a stubborn people. Take off your jewelry while I decide what to do with you."

6. So the people of Israel took off their jewelry from Mount Horeb onward.

7. So Moses delayed building the sanctuary. But he did pitch a temporary tent outside the camp for the people to come with their problems.

8. Whenever Moses went into the tent to talk to the Lord, the people would stand quietly outside their tents and pray.

9-10. The pillar of cloud would come and hover over the tent, and the Lord would talk to Moses. When the people saw the Lord's cloud coming, they would fall on their knees, bow their heads, and worship Him.

11. And when the Lord spoke to Moses, He would do so directly, the way two friends talk to each other. Then after Moses talked with God, he would come back into camp, but Joshua would stay with the tent.

12. The next time God told Moses to break camp, Moses said, "Lord, You asked me to take the people to the land You promised them, but You never told me if You would go with us all the way.

13. "If You've forgiven us and love us, which You said You have, then please show me what to do so I can be a better leader. Lord, these are Your people, and I want to take care of them for You."

14-16. The Lord assured him, "I will go with you all the way and help you." Moses asked, "But suppose the people do something bad again, and You decide to leave us for good? In that case, it would be better to stay right here. How else will other nations

know that we belong to You unless You're with us?"

17-18. The Lord answered, "I will do what you have asked Me to do. I will stay with you and help you. I will be gracious to you." Moses said, "Lord, if You're pleased with me, let me see Your glory."

19. The Lord replied, "Come back up the mountain, and I'll let you see My glory and tell you about Myself. I love to be gracious, merciful, and kind. I'm also fair and just, because that's what love means."

20-23. "But I cannot let you see My face, because no one can look at the glory of My face and live. So when you come up the mountain, I will make a big crack in the rock for you to stand in. I will protect you with My hand as I pass by. Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back, but not My face."

God Renews His Love

34 The Lord also said to Moses, "I want you to make two stone tablets like the ones I gave you that you threw down and broke. I will write the same Ten Commandments on them for you."

2-3. "Have the tablets ready by morning and come up the mountain. I will show you My glory as I promised. Don't bring anyone with you this time, not even halfway up. And no one should come near the mountain, not even an animal."

4-5. So Moses made the stone tablets, and early the next morning he went up the mountain and stood by the rock where the Lord told him to. Then the Lord came down and stood close to Moses and said, "My name is Jehovah. I am who I am. I don't change."

6. Then the Lord made a big crack in the rock for Moses to stand in and

put His hand over the crack as He passed by. As He did, He said, "I am merciful and kind. I am gracious and love to forgive. I am full of goodness and truth."

7. "I will bless thousands who love Me and keep My commandments. But I cannot overlook sin or forgive those who are guilty but don't change their ways. They will have to face the consequences of what they do."

8. After the Lord passed by, He took His hand away, and Moses saw the back of God. Moses was so awed that he bowed his head and worshiped the Lord.

9. Then Moses said, "Lord, now I know that You are pleased with me because You let me see You. Forgive my sins and the sins of the people. We are so stubborn. Stay with us and keep us as Your own."

10-12. The Lord said, "I am ready to renew My love for Your people and to do great things for them that no one has ever seen. I will move your enemies out of the land. Do not make friends with them, or they will turn you against Me."

13-14. "When you go into the land, destroy all the idols they left behind, including their altars and statues. Do not worship these idols, because the Lord loves you and does not want to share you with anyone else."

15. "Do not accept the invitation of your enemies to come and worship with them, because you will want to be polite and will end up eating food offered to idols and do all the other things they do."

16. "Also your young men will see their beautiful girls and marry them, and they will bring their habits of idol worship with them."

17. "When you destroy the idols of your enemies, do not make copies of

them and bring them home. That is still wrong.

18-20. "Remember to keep the Passover with its Festival of Bread, as you did before you left Egypt. Also remember that the oldest son in every family is Mine, as well as the firstborn of all the animals. You may buy them back by bringing a thank offering for their lives being spared.

21. "The people have six days to do all their work, but the Sabbath belongs to Me. They should rest and worship on that day, regardless of the season.

22-24. "In addition to the Passover with its Festival of Bread, the people should also keep the Harvest and the Ingathering festivals. These three festivals are important. I want all the men to come before Me at that time. They don't have to worry about their families. I will protect them, and no enemies will attack your country.

25. "When the people offer the Passover sacrifice, be sure they have unleavened bread with it. They are not to save some lamb's meat for the next day. They should eat all they can and burn the rest.

26. "Tell the people not to boil the meat of the lamb in its mother's milk as the people here do. They think it gives the meat magical power. That sort of thing is wrong. Every year at harvest-time the people should bring Me a sample of the first reaping to thank Me for what I have done for them.

27. "I want you to write these things in a book so the people will not forget what I said."

28. Moses was on the mountain for 40 days and ate and drank nothing because the Lord preserved him. That's when the Lord wrote out the Ten Commandments a second time.

29. As Moses came down from the mountain carrying the stone tablets,

his face was shining with the light of God, but he didn't know it.

30-31. When Aaron and the tribal leaders saw Moses' face, they were afraid to come close to him. Moses asked them why they were afraid. So they told him that it was because of his shining face.

32-33. The people cautiously came, and Moses told them the main things the Lord had said. When he finished, he decided that the next time he would put a veil over his face so the people wouldn't be afraid.

34-35. Whenever he went into the temporary tent outside the camp to talk to the Lord, he would take it off. When he came out to talk to the people, he would put the veil back on.

The Sabbath and the Sanctuary

35 Later Moses told the people everything the Lord had said while he was with Him on the mountain.

2-3. He said to them, "You have six days to do all your work, but the Sabbath belongs to the Lord. It's a time for rest and worship. Gather wood and do your cooking the day before. Don't gather wood on the Sabbath for building a fire. Anyone who stubbornly breaks the Sabbath is to be put to death.

4-9. "The Lord also wants you to bring an offering for building the sanctuary. It can be gold, silver, or copper; blue, purple, or red cloth; leather, sheepskin dyed red, acacia wood, olive oil, spices for incense, or precious stones for Aaron's breastpiece.

10-12. "All who are skilled should come and help. We need to make a tent with frames, crossbars, posts, a golden box with a lid and carrying poles, and a curtain to close off the Most Holy Place.

13-17. "Next we need to make a table to hold bread, a lamp with branches to hold olive oil, an altar of incense, a curtain to close off the Holy Place, an altar of sacrifice, a large washbasin, and a curtain to close off the courtyard.

18-19. "We also need to make tent pegs and ropes and special clothes for Aaron and his sons when they minister before the Lord."

20-21. Then Moses dismissed the people, and they went back to their tents to see what they could find. Everyone brought an offering. And all offerings were used for the sanctuary and for Aaron and his sons' special clothes.

22-24. With willing hearts, men and women brought all kinds of jewelry, such as earrings, rings, and necklaces, to give to the Lord. They also brought blue, purple, and red cloth; animal skins; and special leather. Some brought silver, copper, and acacia wood.

25-26. Women brought blue, purple, and red thread, and were ready to do whatever needed to be done.

27-29. The leaders brought precious stones, spices, olive oil, and incense. They too were ready to help and do whatever needed to be done. The hearts of the people were in it because they loved the Lord.

30-33. Then Moses said, "The Lord has given special knowledge and skill to one of our men from Judah to help us. He will do the artwork and also shape the gold, silver, and copper. He'll also cut the precious stones and carve the wood.

34-35. "The Lord has given him an assistant with knowledge and skill from the tribe of Dan. These two craftsmen will work together and do all the artistic work for the sanctuary."

Building the Sanctuary

36 Moses said, "We need to do everything exactly as the Lord told us."

2-3. Then he called together the two craftsmen and all those who were willing to help these two men, and told them to begin. He gave them all the offerings the people had brought. But the people kept bringing more and more.

4-7. Finally the craftsmen said, "We have more than we need." So Moses told the people to stop and not bring any more, because the builders had more than enough.

8-19. Those who were the most skilled made things directly connected with the sanctuary. They made the curtains with angels on them, the loops and hooks for each piece, and then hooked them together. They made the roof coverings of animal skin and special leather.

20-34. They made the wall frames with silver feet, twenty frames for each side, and six for the back with two corner frames, and crossbars to hold them together. They covered all these crossbars and frames with gold.

35-38. They made curtains with angels for the entrance to the Most Holy Place. There were also curtains for the Holy Place, and posts with hooks on which to hang these curtains.

Making the Furniture

37 The craftsmen made the golden ark with carrying poles, and a cover for it with two statues of angels on it.

10-16. They made the bread table with its carrying poles, golden dishes, and cups and bowls.

17-24. They made the seven-branched golden lampstand and little golden bowls for oil to give light to the sanctuary.

25-28. Then they made the golden altar of incense with horns on each corner, and carrying poles.

29. They also made the anointing oil, incense, and perfume.

The Courtyard

38 The craftsmen built the altar of sacrifice with horns on each corner, a heavy copper screen to sit halfway down inside, and carrying poles. They also made pots, bowls, hooks, and pans. They made the large washbasin with a base made from the bronze mirrors the women donated.

9-17. They made the white curtain that went around the whole sanctuary as a fence, and posts to hang them on. Then they made ropes and stakes. The number of curtains and posts were the same for both sides of the sanctuary, and the back needed only half as many.

18-20. For the front facing east they made the same white curtains and posts, but left space for an entrance with a beautifully colored curtain and four posts.

21-23. Everything was supervised by Moses, and all the material used was written down by Aaron and his sons. The craftsmen and their helpers made all the parts of the sanctuary exactly as the Lord had said.

24-31. They used more than 2,000 pounds of gold, more than 7,000 pounds of silver, and more than 5,000 pounds of copper.

Clothes for the Priests

39 The best cloth was used to make clothes for Aaron and his sons, such as the vest with one large precious stone for each shoulder, the cloth breastpiece with its twelve precious stones and

the golden cords. All this was done exactly as the Lord had said.

22-31. They also made the special robes for Aaron, the long white one and the short blue one with its little golden bells. They also made a tall white turban and a golden headband for him. Then they made the long white robes and flat turbans for his sons.

The Furnishings Finished

32-39. Everything for the sanctuary was done exactly as the Lord wanted it. Then Moses had all the pieces of furniture brought to him: the ark, the bread table, the lamp, and the altar of incense. They also brought the altar of sacrifice and the large washbasin.

40-41. They brought the wall frames, the roof coverings, and curtains, as well as the posts, ropes, and stakes for the fence. They brought the special clothes they had made for Aaron and his sons.

42-43. Moses carefully examined everything to make sure it had been made exactly as the Lord had said. And it was. Moses praised the people for what they had done and blessed them.

The Sanctuary Erected

40 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pitch the sanctuary on the first day of the new year.

3-7. "Put the ark with the Ten Commandments inside the Most Holy Place; the bread table, the lamp, and the altar of incense in the Holy Place; and the altar of sacrifice and the washbasin in the courtyard.

8-11. "Set up the posts and hang the curtains around the sanctuary. Put a little anointing oil on all the furniture to set it apart for holy use, including the altar of sacrifice and the washbasin in the courtyard.

12-15. "Bring Aaron and his sons into

the courtyard and have them wash their hands and feet. Put the high priest clothes on Aaron and the priest clothes on his sons. Put some anointing oil on their heads to set them apart for Me."

16-21. Moses obeyed, and on the first day of the new year he set up the sanctuary as God had said. He made sure that the walls and the posts were put up, and that the three roof coverings were on. Then he brought the ark inside, carefully put the cover on, and hung the curtains for a door.

22-28. He made sure that the bread table was put against the south wall, the lamp against the north wall, and the altar of incense in front of the curtain going into the Most Holy Place. He

saw to it that the curtain was hung for the Holy Place.

29-33. He made sure that the altar of sacrifice and the washbasin were properly placed in the courtyard. Then Moses saw to it that the curtain was hung for the entrance to the sanctuary. Everything was set up just as the Lord wanted it.

34-35. Then the glory of the Lord's presence filled the sanctuary. The light was so brilliant that even Moses couldn't go in.

36-38. Whenever the Lord's cloud lifted from the sanctuary, the people would break camp, and when it stopped, they would stop. During all their travels from Egypt to Canaan, the Lord's cloud was over the sanctuary by day and over it as a pillar of fire by night.

Leviticus

INTRODUCTION: *The third book of the Bible was written by Moses while the Israelites were camped at Mount Sinai. In this book Moses tells the people and priests how to worship God. We learn about sacrifices and offerings, and that God loves His people and wants them to show how much they love Him by obeying Him. The important leaders in this book are Moses and Aaron.*

Animal Offerings

1 After the sanctuary was finished, Moses didn't have to go up the mountain to speak to God anymore because God now spoke to him in the sanctuary.

2. God said, "Tell the people that when they bring Me an offering it should be one of their own animals.

3. "For example, when a man brings a calf he should bring it to the entrance of the sanctuary. The priest will inspect the calf to make sure it's not sick. Then he will invite the man to come into the courtyard.

4. "The man will lay his hands on the head of the calf and in his heart ask God to forgive him and his family for their sins.

5. "Then the priest will give the man a knife and ask him to sacrifice the calf. The priest will catch some of the blood and sprinkle it on four sides of the altar. This will remind you that sin is the cause of death, but that My Son will come and die for you.

6-7. "The man will help the priest prepare the body of the calf for the altar. The priest will lay the meat on the altar and start the fire.

8-9. "Before he does that, he should make sure that all parts of the calf are clean, and then he should ar-

range them on the altar. This whole burnt offering is a sign that the man and his family have totally given themselves to Me.

10-13. "If a man brings a calf, a lamb, or a goat to the sanctuary, he should do it the same way. This will be a sign that he and his family have confessed their sins and consecrated themselves to Me.

14-17. "If a man is poor, he can bring a dove or a young pigeon. He should give it to the priest, who will sacrifice it for him. He will take off the feathers and burn the bird on the altar. It is a sign of total consecration."

Grain Offerings

2 God also said, "When someone brings Me a grain offering, it should be the best flour with a little salt, olive oil, and sweet spices.

2-3. "He should bring it to the priest, who will burn it on the altar as a sign of gratitude for what I have done for the man and his family. The rest of the grain offering will belong to the priests.

4-6. "If the man decides to bring baked bread instead of flour, it should not be made with yeast. If he cooks the bread in a pan over the fire, he should not add yeast to it

either, and when it's done he should sprinkle olive oil on it.

7-10. "He can also fry it or bake it. But however it is made, he should give it to the priest. The priest will burn some of it on the altar as a sign of gratitude for what I have done for the man and his family. The rest of the offering will belong to the priest.

11-13. "The grain offering should be made without yeast or honey. If people bring it to Me as a special offering from their harvest, it should not be burned on the altar. No matter how people bring it to Me, it should be sprinkled with salt. The salt is a sign of friendship between Me and them.

14-16. "If the grain is from the very first harvest, it should be roasted, then sprinkled with olive oil, salt, and sweet spices. The priest will sprinkle some of it with incense and burn it on the altar as a sign that the harvest came from Me."

Peace Offerings

3 God continued: "When someone decides to bring a peace offering, it can be a male or female calf, lamb, or goat, but it must not be sick or deformed.

2. "The man should bring the calf to the sanctuary entrance and wait until the priest invites him into the courtyard. He should lay both hands on the calf's head and recall all the blessings I've given him. Then he should sacrifice the calf. The priest will catch some of the blood and sprinkle it on four sides of the altar.

3-5. "Then he will take the insides and the fatty part of the animal and burn it on the altar. Part of the meat goes to the priest and the rest to the family. This is a sign that the man and his family are happy and at peace with their friends and neighbors.

6-11. "If a man brings a lamb, it too should be healthy, and he should do the same thing he did for the calf. The priest will sprinkle some of the blood on the sides of the altar and then burn the insides and fatty parts. Part of the meat goes to the priest and the rest to the family.

12-16. "If a man decides to bring a young goat, it should be healthy, and he should do the same thing as for the lamb. The priest will sprinkle some of the blood on the sides of the altar and then burn the insides and the fatty parts. As before, part of the meat goes to him and the rest to the family.

17. "I do not want My people to eat fat or blood; it is not good for them. This is a rule for them, no matter who they are or where they live."

Offerings for Unintentional Sins

4 God said to Moses, "If a man sins and breaks a commandment unintentionally, he needs to know what rules to follow.

3. "If the high priest sins and breaks a commandment unintentionally, it's as if the people did it, because he's their official representative.

4-7. "Each needs to bring a calf, lay his hands on its head, and in his heart confess his sin. He should sacrifice the calf, sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the curtain going into the Most Holy Place, put some on the horns of the incense altar, and pour the rest at the foot of the altar of sacrifice.

8-12. "He should take the insides and the fatty parts and burn them on the altar. Then he should take the dead calf outside the camp and burn it there.

13-21. "If the people make a mistake and break a commandment, when they are told about it and are sorry, the elders should bring a calf, place their

hands on its head, and sacrifice it. The high priest will do the same thing for the people as he did for himself.

22-26. "If the head of a tribe makes a mistake and breaks a commandment, when his mistake is pointed out to him and he's sorry, he should bring a male goat, lay his hands on its head, in his heart confess his sin, and then sacrifice the goat. The priest should do everything as he did when the people sinned.

27-31. "If someone who joined My people makes a mistake and breaks one of My commandments, when his mistake is pointed out to him and he's sorry, he too should bring a female goat, in his heart confess his sin, and sacrifice the goat. The priest should do the same thing for him.

32-35. "A man may also bring a female lamb. He should bring it into the courtyard and follow the same procedure as he would have with a calf. The priest should do the same thing as he would have for a calf or a goat."

Other Sin Offerings

5 When the Lord finished giving Moses rules for mistake offerings, He said, "If someone is asked to testify as a witness in court and refuses, he has sinned.

2-3. "If a man innocently touches an unclean animal, he's unclean. When he realizes what he has done, then he's guilty. If someone innocently touches him, he's unclean too. When he realizes what he did was wrong, then he's guilty.

4-6. "If a man makes a promise and swears he will keep it and then breaks it, he has sinned. He must bring a female lamb or a young goat to the sanctuary as a sin offering.

7-10. "If he can't afford a lamb or a goat, he can bring two doves or young

pigeons to the sanctuary. The priest should sacrifice one at a time. He should sprinkle some on the sides of the altar, and the rest goes on the ground. Then he should burn the dove or pigeon on the altar as a sin offering. **11-13.** "If a man can't afford two doves or pigeons, he may bring two pounds of flour without olive oil and sweet herbs to the sanctuary. The priest should take a handful of it and burn it on the altar as a sin offering. The rest of it will belong to the priest."

14-16. The Lord also said, "If a man unintentionally fails to bring all the offerings, he is still guilty. Ignorance is no excuse. When he decides to learn what is right, he should bring a ram or its equivalent in money to the sanctuary as a sin offering. He should bring what he owes, plus one fifth, and his sin is forgiven.

17-19. "If a man doesn't want to know what's right, he has sinned. When someone tells him that his attitude is bad, and he's sorry and decides to change, he should bring a ram or the equivalent in money to the sanctuary as a sin offering for what he has done."

Offerings for Deliberate Sins

6 Next the Lord talked about deliberate sins. He said, "If a man promises to take care of something for his neighbor and then lies and tells him that it was lost or stolen, he has sinned.

3-4. "If a man finds something and doesn't return it, steals something or gets something by deception, and then lies about it and swears he told the truth, he has sinned against Me and the owner.

5. "He must confess his sin and pay back what he took plus one tenth. He should do this before he brings his sin offering to the sanctuary.

6-7. "If there is a question about how much the man should pay back, the priest should estimate the damages. Then he will offer the sheep as a sin offering for what the man has done against Me and the owner."

The Duties of the Priest

8-11. Then the Lord talked about the duties of the priest and said, "The fire for the evening offering should be kept slowly burning all night. In the morning the priest should put on his priestly clothes, take the ashes, and put them beside the altar. Then he should change his clothes and take the ashes outside the camp."

12-13. "Every morning he should put new wood on the altar and then offer the required sacrifice. The fire should be kept burning day and night."

14-15. "If a man brings a grain or flour offering, the priest should take a handful of the flour with its olive oil and sweet herbs, hold it up before Me, and then put it on the altar to burn with the morning offering."

16-18. "The rest of the grain or the flour belongs to the priest. If he makes it into bread, he, or other priests, must eat it in the sanctuary courtyard, because it is just as holy as a sin or peace offering."

19-23. "When Aaron and his sons are set apart for Me, each one should bring two pounds of flour as an offering—one pound in the morning and one in the evening. It should be mixed with olive oil and water and baked, then broken into smaller pieces and burned on the altar. This offering should not be eaten, but all of it should be burned."

24-27. "Also tell Aaron and his sons that the animals people bring for a sin offering should be sacrificed only in the sanctuary and no place else."

The meat for the priests should be eaten only in the sanctuary. The clothes that get spattered with blood should be washed in a special place, not just anywhere.

28-30. "If the priests cook their meat in the clay pot, the pot should be broken. If they cook it in a copper pot, the pot should be carefully washed and rinsed. Any male in the priest's family may eat the meat, but it should be thoroughly cooked. The rest of the meat should be burned on the altar."

Summary

7 The Lord continued: "Let Me review some of the regulations for you. The most important offering is the sin offering. The animal should be sacrificed only in the courtyard. Some of its blood should be sprinkled on all sides of the altar, and the insides and the fatty parts shall be burned. The meat belongs to the priest, as does the hide of the animal."

9-10. "If a man can only afford to bring grain for the sin offering, whether it is cooked, baked, or fried, part of it belongs to the priest, whether it is mixed with olive oil or not. He should share it with other priests."

11-15. "The peace offering is next in importance. When a man is thankful for what I have done for him and he brings an animal, he should also bring some bread made with olive oil. He should eat from the meat that day. None should be left for the next day."

16-18. "If the peace offering is fulfilling a promise, some of the meat should be eaten that day, and some can be saved for the next day. But on the third day it should be burned. If it's not burned, the offering is unacceptable and the priest is held responsible."

19-21. "If the meat to be eaten for the fellowship meal touches anything

that is not clean, it should be burned. If someone eats who is not supposed to, he will lose his privilege of being part of My people.

22-27. "No one should eat the fat of animals, whether they were slaughtered or died of natural causes. The fat of an animal sacrificed for an offering is Mine. Anyone who eats it will lose his privilege of being part of My people. No one should bake or eat the blood of animals. Anyone who does must be separated from My people.

28-36. "A peace offering is special to Me. The fat of the animal should be burned. The meat from the breast and the right shoulder should be held up to Me as a gift, and then it will belong to the priest. This rule applies to Aaron and his sons, as well as for all future priests who will be set aside for Me."

37-38. These are some of the rules for the different offerings as well as for the offerings for the dedication of priests. The Lord told Moses all these things when he was on the mountain with Him.

Aaron and His Sons

8 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Bring Aaron and his sons into the courtyard with their priestly robes, some anointing oil, a young bull, two rams, and a basket of unleavened bread. Then tell the people to come and watch."

4-5. Moses did what the Lord said, and when the people came, he told them what the meeting was for.

6-9. He asked Aaron and his sons to come into the courtyard. He washed their hands and feet, put the white robe on Aaron with the shorter blue one on top, then the vest with the cloth breastpiece, and finally the white turban with the gold headband.

10-13. Next, he touched all the pieces of furniture in the sanctuary with a little olive oil and put some on Aaron's head as a sign that both he and the sanctuary belonged to the Lord. Moses also put long white robes on Aaron's sons and flat white turbans on their heads.

14-17. After that, he brought the young bull into the courtyard and sacrificed it as a sin offering. He burned the insides and the fatty parts on the altar and took the rest of the body outside the camp and burned it.

18-21. He brought one of the rams into the courtyard and sacrificed it as a burnt offering of dedication. He did all the other things he was told to do and then burned the rest of the body on the altar.

22-25. He also brought the second ram into the courtyard and sacrificed it as an ordination offering for Aaron and his sons. He put a little of the blood on Aaron's right ear, right hand, and the big toe of his right foot. He did the same for his sons.

26-29. Then he took some bread from the basket together with a little meat, gave them to Aaron and his sons, and told them to hold them up before the Lord. Then Moses took the bread and meat and burned them on the altar. This was a sign of their dedication to the Lord.

30. Last of all, Moses took a little olive oil and blood and touched the robes of Aaron and his sons to show that even their clothes were dedicated to the Lord.

31-32. Then Moses said to Aaron and his sons, "Take some of the meat, cook it, and eat it with some of the bread here in the courtyard. What's left, burn on the altar."

33-35. "Stay in the sanctuary for the next seven days. It will take that long

to complete the whole ceremony. This will give you more time to study and pray. Each day the Lord will tell us what to do next. If you leave the sanctuary, the Lord will leave you, and you will die."

36. Aaron and his sons did everything the Lord asked them to do.

Aaron Begins His Ministry

9 After Aaron and his sons' ordination, Moses called the tribal leaders together and said to Aaron,

2-4. "Take a calf for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. Then tell the leaders that each one should bring a young goat for a sin offering, a calf and a lamb for a burnt offering, and a young bull and a ram for a peace offering. They should also bring an offering of flour mixed with oil."

5-7. As the people watched, the leaders did everything they were told to do. Moses said to the leaders, "I asked you to do this because today the Lord will let you see His glory." He said to Aaron, "First sacrifice your animals for your sins, then sacrifice the animals the leaders brought for their sins."

8-21. So Aaron and his sons sacrificed their animals first, then the animals the leaders brought. For each sacrifice they did exactly what they were supposed to do.

22-23. When Aaron finished, he turned to the people and blessed them. Then Moses and Aaron went into the sanctuary. When they came out, they both blessed the people.

24. Suddenly the glory of the Lord filled the sanctuary, and fire came down and burned up the sacrifices. The people stood in awe. Then they gave a shout of joy, fell on their knees, and bowed before the Lord.

Strange Fire

10 One day Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu, were working at the sanctuary. They had been drinking alcoholic wine, so they weren't thinking right. They lit their incense from a fire they had made instead of from the altar.

2. As they swaggered toward the Holy Place where the altar of incense was, the light of God's glory closed in on them, and they died in the sight of the people.

3. Moses said to Aaron, "The Lord means what He says. He told us not to drink alcoholic beverages, but to do things just as He said." Aaron was so shaken by what had happened to his sons that he couldn't talk.

4-5. Then Moses asked two young Levites to come into the courtyard and carry out their dead cousins. They carried them out dressed in their sanctuary clothes.

6. Moses said to Aaron and his two other sons, "Don't take off your turbans or tear your robes in grief. God does not want you to mourn over Nadab and Abihu. The rest of the family can, but not you.

7. "The Lord does not want you to stop the sanctuary service, but to continue what you're doing. So stay right here and carry on your ministry."

8-9. Then the Lord said to Aaron, "You and your sons are not to drink anything with alcohol in it, especially when you come into My presence, or what happened to Nadab and Abihu could happen to you. This rule is for all priests forever.

10-11. "You need to know the difference between right and wrong more than anyone else. You and your sons must set the right example for the people by listening to Me and doing exactly what I tell you."

12. Then Moses said to Aaron and his sons, "Take some grain left over from the offering, make some bread with it, and eat it right here beside the altar.

13-15. "You know what to do with the sacrifices, what parts should be burned and what parts belong to you and your families. Some parts should be held up before the Lord before you burn them and other parts like the insides and the fat should be burned right away. Do what the Lord says."

16. Then Moses looked for the little goat that was to be sacrificed and couldn't find it. He asked where it was, and they said it had already been sacrificed. Moses was really upset, because they should have waited.

17. He said, "You were supposed to eat a little of its meat before you put it on the altar. This is important because it's a sign that you're carrying the sins of the people before the Lord to be forgiven.

18. "Or you could have taken a little blood into the Holy Place as a sign of transferring the sins from the people to the sanctuary."

19. Aaron said, "My sons and I are still in shock from what happened to Nadab and Abihu. Is the Lord more pleased with the right ritual or with the right attitude? How can we carry the sins of the people before the Lord when our own hearts are hurting so?"

20. Then Moses understood why they had sacrificed the little goat before eating some of its meat, and he overlooked their mistake.

A New Diet

11 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Tell the people what they may eat and what they should not.

3-8. "You may eat the meat from any animal with divided hooves that

chews its food a second time, such as cows. Don't eat the meat from animals that chew their food this way but do not have divided hoofs, such as camels and rabbits. Some animals have divided hoofs but don't chew their food a second time, such as pigs. Don't eat them.

9-12. "Also be careful about eating seafood. If fish have scales and fins, you may eat them. But if they don't, like oysters, they are not good for you. Whether you catch fish from rivers, lakes, or the ocean, it makes no difference. The same rule applies.

13-23. "Do not eat birds like vultures, hawks, eagles, ravens, seagulls, owls, pelicans, storks, and bats. They are not good for you. Insects also are not good to eat unless they hop like grasshoppers. But if they fly or crawl, do not eat them.

24-28. "If you pick up a dead animal or even touch it, you need to wash yourself and your clothes, because the animal might have a disease. Do not eat animals that have paws, like dogs. If they die and you have to pick them up, be sure to wash yourself and your clothes, because they might have died from some disease.

29-31. "This same rule applies to animals like weasels, rats, mice, lizards, moles, geckos, chameleons, snakes, and many other animals that slither along the ground.

32-38. "If such an animal dies and falls on something, the wood or cloth it fell on should be carefully cleaned. If it falls into a pot, what is in the pot should be thrown out, and the pot should be carefully washed or destroyed. If it falls on dry seeds, you can use the seed, but if it falls on seeds soaking in water, the seeds should be thrown out.

39-40. "If an animal that you may eat

dies, it also might have had a disease. Do not eat it. If you have to carry it away, you need to wash yourself and your clothes afterward.

41-45. "Do not eat anything that crawls and slithers. You might get sick. I want you to be healthy, because I love you and care about you. So do not eat such creeping, crawling things. I brought you out of Egypt to be a happy, healthy people."

46-47. These are the regulations that God gave Moses for the people, so they would know what animals to eat and not to eat.

Rules for Mothers and Babies

12 The Lord said to Moses, "Tell the people that when a mother has a baby boy she should have special care for seven days.

3-4. "On the eighth day the boy should be circumcised. Then she should continue to rest for another thirty-three days. During this time she should not participate in any special ceremonies.

5. "If she has a baby girl, she should have special care for fourteen days. Then she should continue to rest for another sixty-six days and not participate in any special ceremonies.

6-7. "After she has rested, she should bring a one-year-old lamb and a dove or a pigeon to the sanctuary for an offering. She should do this whether the baby is a boy or a girl.

8. "If she cannot afford a lamb, she may bring two doves or pigeons. The priest will offer them for her as a burnt offering and a sin offering."

Diseases

13 Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "When someone has a swelling, a scab, or a

bright red spot on his skin it could be the beginning of leprosy. So he should go to see the priest.

3-4. "The priest will examine him, and if the hair in the sore is white, it's leprosy. If the sore has a white spot but the hair has not changed, it's not leprosy. In that case, the priest should tell the man to go home and come back a week later.

5-6. "Then the priest should look at the sore again. If it hasn't spread, he should give the man another week. If after the second week the sore is getting better, it was only a rash. Then the man should wash himself and the clothes he wore.

7-8. "If the rash comes back, he should go back and have the priest take a look at it. If the rash has spread, the man has leprosy.

9-17. "If someone has other skin problems, he should also go to see the priest, who will follow the same procedure. He'll look at it and decide if it's leprosy. Or the man may need to come back later when it's more obvious to the priest what it is.

18-23. "If someone has a boil and it heals, but then comes back again, he too should go to the priest and be examined. He should follow the same rules.

24-28. "If a person burns himself and the sore gets worse, he should go to the priest and let him decide what the problem is.

29-37. "If a man or a woman has a sore on his head, he or she should also go to the priest to have him look at it.

38-39. "When someone has white spots on his skin, those spots should also be looked at by the priest.

40-44. "If a man is bald and has red spots on his head, he should have the priest look at them to see if he has leprosy or not.

45-46. "If the man has leprosy, he should stay outside the camp and away from people. If he must go where people are, he should uncover his head and call out, 'Unclean! Unclean!'"

47-52. "When clothes have mildew or fungus on them, the person should go and let the priest look at them. If the priest can't tell for sure what it is, the person should bring it back a week later. By then, if the mildew or fungus has gotten bigger, the clothes should be burned.

53-55. "If the mildew or fungus has not spread, a week later the priest should look at it again. If it's still there, even though it's not bigger, the clothes should still be burned.

56-58. "If by then the mildew or fungus is smaller but still there, it should be cut out. If it comes back in another place, the clothes should be burned."

59. These are the rules the Lord gave to the people to keep themselves clean and free from disease.

Lepers Who Are Cured

14 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Those who have been cured of leprosy should go through a ritual as a witness to the people that they are clean.

3-4. "The priest should make sure the leprosy is gone. Then he should ask the person to bring two birds, a piece of cedar wood, a red cord, and a twig from a hyssop plant.

5-7. "The priest shall kill one of the birds, sprinkle its blood on the man seven times, and drip some of it into a pot of clean water. Then he should dip the live bird, with the wood, the twig and the cord, into the water and let it fly away. This shows that the man is clean.

8-9. "Then the man should wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and take a bath. Now he's ready to come back

into camp, but not to his own tent for another week. After that he should shave his hair again, wash his clothes, and take a bath. This is a witness that he's cured and may go back home.

10-13. "The next day he should bring three lambs to the sanctuary, together with some flour and olive oil. One lamb should be offered for the sin of neglect, together with the oil. Some of the meat should be held up to Me before it is burned.

14-18. "Then the priest should put a little blood on the man's right ear, right thumb, and on the big toe of his right foot. He should sprinkle the olive oil on the altar and put some on the man's right ear, right thumb, and the big toe of his right foot. He should put the rest of it on the man's head.

19-20. "Next, he should sacrifice the second lamb as a sin offering and the third lamb as a burnt offering and a sign of consecration.

21-24. "If the man cannot afford to bring three lambs, he can bring one, together with the flour and oil, plus two doves or young pigeons. The priest should do the same thing, as if the man had brought three lambs.

25-31. "He should put some blood and some oil on the man's right ear, right thumb, and on the big toe of his right foot. Then he should offer one dove or pigeon as a sin offering and the other dove or pigeon as a consecration offering."

32. These are the regulations for the person who has been cured of leprosy.

Contaminated Houses

33-36. The Lord continued, "When the people get to the land of Canaan and find mildew in a house, they should tell the priest about it. Before he comes, they should move everything out.

37-42. "He should inspect the house, and if he finds mildew in the walls, he should order the house closed for one week and then inspect it again. If the mildew has spread, he should order the infected bricks taken to the city dump and new bricks put in.

43-47. "Later, if it looks like the mildew has come back, the priest should look at it again. If it is mildew, he will order the whole house torn down and taken to the city dump. And everyone in the house should wash their clothes and take a bath.

48-49. "If the priest inspects the house and the mildew has not come back, he will announce that it's clean. Then he will bring two birds, a piece of cedar wood, a red cord, and a twig from a hyssop plant.

50-53. "He should kill one of the birds, put a little blood into a pot of clean water, dip the other bird with the wood, the cord, and the twig into it, and then let the bird go free. He should sprinkle some of this water on the walls of the house to show that it's clean."

54-57. These are the rules for mildew in houses and on clothes to help God's people stay healthy and clean.

How to Prevent Disease

15 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "When someone has an oozing sore, he can spread disease. If he has a swelling in his body, there is a problem. His bed should be kept clean, and anyone who is taking care of him should wash and bathe frequently.

6-12. "The sick man's clothes should be changed often and washed, as well as the clothes of those taking care of him and doing his laundry. The sick man should wash his hands before he touches anything or anyone. Clay

dishes should be destroyed; other dishes should be thoroughly washed.

13-15. "After the man is better, he should stay another week and then wash his clothes and bathe in running water. The next day he should bring two doves or two young pigeons to the sanctuary for the priest to sacrifice as a sin and consecration offering.

16-24. "People who sleep together should especially keep themselves clean. If a man has a discharge, he should wash his clothes and bathe. If a woman is bleeding, both she and the one touching her should wash their clothes and bathe.

25-30. "If the bleeding does not stop, special care should be given until it does. When it does, she should rest for seven days. The next day she should take two doves or young pigeons to the sanctuary for the priest to sacrifice as a sin and consecration offering.

31. "You and Aaron should teach the people these things. I want them to be healthy and clean, especially when they come to worship Me at the sanctuary."

32-33. These are the rules that God gave for those who are sick, who have a discharge, who are bleeding, and who sleep together.

The Day of Atonement

16 After the death of Aaron's two sons, God said to Moses, "Tell your brother Aaron that he should come into the Most Holy Place only once a year. That day will be called the Day of Atonement. I will be there in a small white cloud between the angels on the cover of the ark.

3. "On that day Aaron should plan to offer a calf and a ram as a sin and consecration offering before coming into the Most Holy Place.

4. "Before doing this, he shall bathe

and put on his regular priestly clothes with the white robe and turban.

5. "The tribal leaders will bring two goats to him for a sin offering and a ram for a consecration offering.

6-7. "Aaron will offer the calf he brought for his own sins and the sins of his family. Next he will bring in the two goats to see which one should be sacrificed next.

8. "He will take two little stones and write 'For the Lord' on one and 'To be sent away' on the other. He should put the little stones in a container and pull one out.

9. "He will tie a red cord around the neck of the Lord's goat. This is the one to be sacrificed for the sins of the people.

10. "He will tie a red cord on the horns of the other goat. This goat represents Satan and will be taken into the wilderness to die.

11-13. "After Aaron sacrifices the calf he brought for himself, he will put some incense on the hot coals of the altar in front of the Most Holy Place.

14. "Also he should bring a little blood from the calf into the Most Holy Place and sprinkle it in front of the ark seven times.

15-16. "Then he will go back to the courtyard, sacrifice the Lord's goat for the sins of the people, take some of its blood into the Most Holy Place, and sprinkle it before the ark. This is a sign that the sins of the people are taken care of.

17. "No one will be in the sanctuary while Aaron is doing all this.

18-19. "Then he will go back into the courtyard and put some of the blood from the calf and the goat on the little horns of the altar and sprinkle some on the altar itself.

20-22. "After that Aaron will lay his hands on the other goat as a sign that

Satan is responsible for starting sin. Then a man should take the goat into the wilderness where it will die.

23-25. "Aaron will then go into the Holy Place, take off his white robe, wash himself, and put on his high priestly clothes. Then he should go back into the courtyard and offer the regular daily sacrifice showing that the new religious year has begun.

26. "The man who took the goat away shall wash himself and his clothes before coming back into camp.

27-28. "The calf and the goat that were sacrificed should be taken outside the camp and burned. The man who does this should also wash himself and his clothes before coming back to camp.

29. "The Day of Atonement will be on the tenth day of the seventh month. It should be kept like a Sabbath. No one should work on that day. My people shall pray and think about the meaning of what Aaron is doing.

30-31. "This is the day when the record of the sins of My people is erased. So it is a very special day and should always be kept in the same way as a Sabbath.

32-33. "When Aaron dies, the next high priest will offer the same sacrifices and do the same work in the Most Holy Place. This is a sign that the sins of the people are removed.

34. "This should be done at the same time every year. It will give the people courage to know that someday all sin will be gone and Satan will be no more."

People Are Important

17 The Lord said to Moses, "Pass these rules on to Aaron and his sons and to the people: If someone does not bring his offering to the sanctuary but sacrifices the animal out in the field, he is guilty and

will no longer be part of My people.

5-7. "He must bring his sacrifice to Me, and the priest must offer it for him and handle the blood. The man is not to do it himself somewhere else. The people should not sacrifice animals to idols anywhere, because that would be worshiping demons.

8-10. "Anyone who sacrifices an animal out in the field, whether he is an Israelite or a foreigner living with you, will be separated from My people. If anyone bakes and eats blood or eats meat with blood still in it, he cannot be part of My people.

11-13. "Blood represents life. When an animal is sacrificed on the altar, it shows that one life is given for another so people's sins can be forgiven. That's why no one should eat blood as if it were just ordinary food. It has special meaning. When people kill an animal for meat and some of the blood falls on the ground, they should cover it up.

14. "Blood means life, and life is sacred. I do not want people eating it. If anyone does, he will no longer be part of My people.

15-16. "If anyone eats meat from an animal found dead, he needs to wash his clothes and take a bath so he does not catch some disease and spread it. If he does not do so, he is guilty of carelessness."

Purity

18 The Lord continued by saying to Moses, "Tell the people that I love them and do not want them to do the bad things other people do. They should listen to Me and do what I ask them to do. I do not want the devil to control them. I want to live in their hearts.

6-17. "People should not marry their relatives. Men and women who are not

married should not sleep together, even if they are relatives. That also applies to relatives by marriage, such as brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law.

18-20. "Do not take your wife's sister as a second wife while your first wife lives. Don't sleep with your wife during her monthly period. Don't sleep with your neighbor's wife.

21-23. "Don't sacrifice a baby to an idol. Don't practice homosexuality. That's an awful sin. Don't have sex with an animal. That's even worse and a terrible perversion.

24-25. "Don't do the detestable things people here are doing. I will punish them and expel them from their country and give it to you. I can no longer bless their land.

26-30. "I do not want you to do what the people here have been doing, whether you are an Israelite by birth or not. If you do these wicked things, I cannot bless you and call you Mine. If you obey My laws and don't do these wicked things, you will be My people, and I will be your God."

Worship

19 The Lord said to Moses, "Talk to the people for Me and tell them that I want them to be holy because I am holy. They should respect their parents and keep My Sabbath. They shall not worship idols, because I am the Lord their God.

5-8. "When they bring an offering, they should follow the rules that I have given them. The meat should be eaten that day or the next. But on the third day anything that is left over should be burned. If anyone eats the leftovers, I will not accept his offering. He will no longer be part of My people.

9-10. "When you harvest your grain, do not pick every last bit. Leave some in the corners of your fields for the

poor so they can have something to feed their families. Do the same with your grape harvest.

11-13. "Don't steal, lie, cheat, or swear to keep a promise and then break it. That embarrasses Me. Be honest. Don't take advantage of others. Pay people for the work they do on the day you promised.

14. "Don't make fun of people who can't hear. Don't put something in front of a blind man to make him trip and fall just to have some fun. That's cruel.

15-16. "Don't play favorites by being good to rich people and ignoring those who are poor. Be honest and fair to everyone. Don't judge people. Don't spread rumors about them. And don't endanger someone else's life.

17-18. "Don't hate people. Don't keep quiet if you see someone do something bad or overlook it as if it doesn't matter. Don't hold a grudge against someone. Love people and be kind to them.

19. "Keep My commandments and stay close to Me. Some people think that by trying to mate a sheep with a goat, or by sowing different seeds in the same field, or by wearing clothes made of a certain material, it will give them magical powers. All these ideas are from the devil.

20-22. "If a man sleeps with a maid-servant who is engaged to be married, he should be punished and made to pay for what he did. He not only sinned against the maid but also against Me. He should bring an animal as a sin offering to the priest at the sanctuary, and if he repents he will be forgiven.

23-25. "When you come into the land of Canaan and plant little fruit trees, don't eat the fruit for the first three years. In the fourth year bring the fruit to Me as a thank offering. After that the fruit is yours, and I will continue to bless you.

26-28. "Don't eat meat that still has blood in it. Don't practice witchcraft. Don't shave off the sides of your head and clip your beard to make it square, because that's what the pagans do as a sign of loyalty to their gods. Don't tattoo your bodies or cut yourself as a sign of mourning for the dead.

29. "Don't let your daughter join foreigners in their pagan worship. Only wicked things happen there.

30. "Keep the Sabbath and respect the sanctuary, because both are Mine.

31. "Don't go for advice to people who tell you that they can talk with the dead. That's witchcraft. Stay away from them, or you'll get caught up in it.

32. "Respect old people. When you do this, you're respecting Me.

33-34. "Do not mistreat foreigners. Treat them as you would like to be treated. You were foreigners in Egypt and know what it is to be mistreated.

35-37. "When you sell things to people, use honest weights and measures. I am the Lord, the one who brought you out of Egypt and made you a free people. Keep My commandments. I gave them to you because I love you."

Penalties for Breaking the Law

20 The Lord continued: "Talk to the people for Me and tell them that if anyone sacrifices a baby to an idol, he shall be put to death.

4-5. "If My people do not convict him and give him the death penalty, I will step in and turn against him. If his family does not try to stop him from sacrificing the baby, I will turn against them and against anyone who went to watch him do it.

6-7. "If anyone plays with magic or wizardry or goes to anyone who claims to talk to spirits, I will cut him off from My people.

8. "Keep My laws and obey them, and I will protect you and help you to be good.

9. "Anyone who practices spiritualism by putting a devil's curse on his parents should be put to death.

10-12. "If a man sleeps with another man's wife and she agreed, they should both be put to death. If a grown man sleeps with his stepmother or daughter-in-law and she agreed, they should both be put to death.

13-16. "If two men have sex together, they have done a disgusting thing and should be put to death. If someone has sex with an animal, that too is disgusting, and he should also be put to death.

17-21. "A man should not marry his sister or his half sister. If he does, he should be punished. A grown man should not sleep with his sister, mother, or aunt. If she agreed, they should all be punished. If a man sleeps with his brother's wife and she agreed, they will be childless and will have no part in the future of Israel.

22-24. "Keep My laws and obey them. They will be a protection to you. All the things I just told you not to do, the people in the land of Canaan are doing. They will not listen, and that is why I have to punish them. Don't do what they do, because you're different. I am your God.

25-26. "Do not eat what they eat. They eat anything, whether it's clean or unclean. But you are a holy people and belong to Me.

27. "Most important, any man or woman who talks with demons should be put to death, or they will get others to do the same thing."

Rules for Priests

21 The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons that priests should not touch a

dead person, unless it's someone from their own family.

5-6. "They should not shave their heads, cut off parts of their beards, or cut their bodies to show grief over someone who dies. They have been set apart for the sanctuary.

7-9. "Priests should not marry someone who has openly lived in sin or been divorced. If someone in the priest's family openly sins and refuses to change, they should be cut off from My people.

10-12. "The high priest should be chosen from among the priests. He shall be anointed and set apart to wear his high priestly clothes. He should not uncover his head or tear his clothes as a sign of grief. Nor should he be in charge of funerals, even for someone in his own family. He is to do the work of the sanctuary.

13-15. "He shall not marry a widow or a divorced person, but only a virgin. His marriage is to represent Me and My people.

16-23. "No one who is blind or has other disabilities should be made a priest, because priests represent Me. If he's a member of the priest's family, he can eat from the offerings, but he can't be a priest."

24. Moses gave all these rules to Aaron and his sons just as the Lord gave them to him.

Other Rules for Priests

22 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Here are some other things that I want you to tell Aaron and his sons. Tell them to handle every offering carefully and with respect. If they handle the offerings carelessly or if they serve when they are not supposed to, the priesthood should be taken away from them.

4-7. "If a priest has a skin infection or

some other disease, he should not serve until he is well. If he accidentally touches a dead body, he should not serve or eat from the offering until he washes his clothes and bathes. The next day he can serve again.

8-9. "Priests should not eat meat from an animal that has died or been killed by a wild animal. The meat might be diseased. They should keep My commandments and follow all the rules of the priesthood. I have set them apart to serve Me.

10-11. "Only the priest and his family may eat from the offerings, not his servants and guests. If he owns a slave, he is like a member of the family and should be treated that way.

12-13. "If a priest's daughter marries outside the priesthood, she no longer has the rights of belonging to the priest's family. But if she's divorced or widowed and lives at home, those rights are hers again.

14-16. "If someone eats from the offerings who shouldn't have, he has to pay for it plus some more. A stranger should not be allowed to eat from the offerings. These offerings are holy because the people gave them to Me. If a priest lets him do that, they both are guilty and must pay for it."

17-25. The Lord spoke to Moses again and said, "Tell Aaron and his sons that if a foreigner living in Israel brings an offering, it should not be defective. If it is, it should not be accepted. This same rule applies to strangers who bring their offerings to Me.

26-28. "A newly born calf, lamb, or goat should stay with its mother for seven days before it can be offered. Do not sacrifice a mother and its baby on the same day.

29-30. "When people bring offerings to Me, they should do it because they

want to, not because they have to. Any meat they are allowed to eat should be eaten that day. Nothing should be kept for the next day.

31-33. "Keep my commandments and respect my name. I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt and set you free."

Special Days

23 The Lord continued by saying to Moses, "Tell the people to keep the special days that I have set aside for them.

3. "The Sabbath comes every week. They have six days to do all their work, but the seventh day belongs to Me.

4-6. "The Passover is important and comes once a year. It lasts for one day and begins at sundown on the fourteenth day of the first month. Then the Festival of Bread begins, which lasts for one week. During this time no bread made with yeast should be eaten.

7-8. "The first day of that week is a holy day. No work should be done. Each day the people should bring Me their offerings. The last day of that week is also holy.

9-11. "When the people come into the land of Canaan they should celebrate the barley harvest in connection with this week, and bring a sample of their harvest to the priest. After the Sabbath he will lift the sample harvest up before Me, and I will accept it as coming from them.

12-14. "In addition, the people should bring a lamb as a consecration offering together with some flour mixed with olive oil and also some grape juice. They should not eat from the new harvest until they have brought their offerings to Me.

15-17. "The third festival will be held fifty days later in the third month. It is

the festival of Pentecost and comes at the time of the wheat harvest. The people should bring a sample of the wheat harvest to Me together with two loaves of bread from the new wheat and some grape juice.

18-20. "The priest should offer seven lambs, one calf, and two rams as a consecration offering. He should also offer one goat as a sin offering and two lambs as a peace offering. Meat from the two lambs and the two loaves of bread will be for the priest.

21. "On that day no regular work should be done. It's like a Sabbath. Come together for worship and be joyful over what I have done. Do this wherever you live.

22. "When My people reap their harvests, they should leave some around the edges of their fields for the poor. I am the one who has blessed them with these harvests.

23-24. "The next special day will be the Day of Trumpets. It shall be held on the first day of the seventh month. It too is a day of worship and celebration.

25. "The people should bring Me a food offering and not do any work on that day, but keep it holy as you do the Sabbath. It will begin a period of preparation for the Day of Atonement.

26-27. "The Day of Atonement comes on the tenth day of the seventh month. It is the most sacred day of the year. That's when everyone should examine their hearts and lives to be sure they really love Me and are not just pretending.

28-29. "No work should be done on that day, but it shall be kept like a Sabbath. This is the day when all confessed sins will be taken away. Anyone who does not examine his heart and life does not belong to Me.

30-32. "Anyone who works on that day shall be punished. This rule is

for all My people and their children after them. From sunset to sunset you shall keep the Sabbath and these special days.

33-34. "The fifteenth day of that month begins the weeklong Harvest Festival. It is a harvest of olives and fruit, the last harvest of the year.

35-36. "The beginning of that week is like a Sabbath. The people should do no work on that day, but come before Me with joy in their hearts for what I have done for them. Each day of that week the priest should bring Me an offering. The last day of that week is also like a Sabbath.

37. "The six festivals you should observe are: the Passover, the Festival of Special Bread, Pentecost, the Day of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Harvest Festival.

38. "These special days are in addition to the weekly Sabbath. The offerings people will bring are in addition to the regular ones.

39. "The Harvest Festival is the last festival of the year. It is thanksgiving time, when My people should be grateful and full of joy for what I have done for them.

40-43. "On the first day of this special week they should take some branches and make a little shelter for themselves in which to camp. They will do this every year. I want them to remember how they camped in shelters after I brought them out of Egypt."

44. Moses told the people everything the Lord had said.

Sanctuary Rules

24 God said to Moses, "Tell the people to bring you some olive oil for the lamps in the sanctuary. Every evening Aaron should make sure that there is enough oil in the seven lamps to last all night.

5-9. "The priests should use the best flour to make twelve loaves of flat bread and put them in two stacks of six on the bread table. Then they should set a little cup of incense on each stack. Every week, just before the Sabbath, the stacks should be replaced with fresh bread. No one should eat this bread except the priests."

Rules About Cursing

10-11. While the Lord was talking to Moses, a young man decided to pitch his tent outside his assigned area. Another man tried to stop him, and they got into a fight. When he was taken to court, he refused to obey the judge and cursed the God of Israel. So the judge decided to take the case to Moses.

12-14. Moses kept the young man in custody and asked the Lord what to do. The Lord said, "Take the young man and try him outside the camp. Those who saw what he did and heard him curse Me should come and testify. After the accusations have been verified, he should be put to death."

15-17. "Tell the people that anyone who curses God should be put to death. Anyone who murders another person should also be put to death."

18. "Anyone who kills someone's animal should replace it."

19-20. "If anyone purposely hurts someone else, breaks his arm or leg, injures his eye or knocks out a tooth, the same thing should be done to him."

21. "As I said, if someone kills someone's animal, he should replace it. If he kills a person, he should be put to death."

22. "These laws apply to everyone, whether they are foreigners or not."

23. When Moses told the people what the Lord had said, they took the

young man outside the camp and stoned him to death.

Rules for the People

25 The Lord said to Moses, "Tell the people that when they get to the land of Canaan and start raising crops, they should let the ground rest every seventh year."

3-7. "For six years they may plant their crops, but the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath. The people should not harvest or store anything that grows of itself. But they and their servants may eat whatever the land naturally produces. It also will feed their cattle and the wild animals."

8-10. The Lord also said, "The people should multiply seven years by seven, which will give them forty-nine years. On the Day of Atonement that year, the priests should blow the trumpets to announce the next year as the Year of Jubilee."

11-13. "The fiftieth year is a year of joy and celebration. No sowing or harvesting shall be done. And all property shall go back to the family who owned it originally."

14-17. "If a family has to sell their property, they should not be taken advantage of. The price shall be determined by the number of years left before the next Year of Jubilee. If there are many years, the higher the price. If there are fewer years, the lower the price. So be honest with each other. I am the Lord."

18-22. "If you follow these rules, I will bless you, and you will live in peace and safety. Don't worry about the sabbatical year, when the land is resting. In the sixth year your crops will be twice as big so they will last you for two years until the new harvest."

23-28. "Actually all the land belongs

to Me. If a family sells their property, they have the right to buy it back any time. If they are too poor, their relatives may buy it for them. The price is figured according to the years left before the next Year of Jubilee.

29-31. "If the family lives in the city and they sell their house, they have a right to buy it back during the first year. If they don't, the house will belong to the buyer for good. Farmhouses are different—they go with the land.

32-34. "Priests who live in the city can buy back their houses any time, because that is the only thing they are allowed to own. They can have a little land to grow food, but it will belong to Me and not to them. It cannot be sold.

35-38. "If someone becomes poor and needs a loan because he can no longer support his family, don't charge him interest. Remember how kind I was to you to bring you out of slavery and give you the land you have.

39-43. "If someone gets so in debt that he must sell himself as a slave, he should be treated as a respected worker. And when the Year of Jubilee comes, he should be allowed to go free and his property should be restored to him.

44-46. "If foreigners have sold themselves to you as slaves, you may set them free or not, as you choose. But they have a right to buy their freedom any time they want.

47-52. "If a foreigner who lives among you becomes rich and one of My people sells himself to him, he should be set free the same year as other slaves. His relatives have the right to buy him back anytime. The price is figured by the years left before the Year of Jubilee.

53-55. "You should make sure that the foreigner living among you treats his Hebrew slaves with the same re-

spect that he does any other worker. My people belong to Me, not to someone else, no matter how rich. I am the one who brought them out of Egypt and set them free."

The Importance of Obedience

26 The Lord continued to talk to Moses, saying, "Tell the people not to make idols or to set up statues of pagan gods. There are no other gods but Me.

2. "Keep the Sabbath and respect My sanctuary. I am the Lord your God.

3-5. "If you obey Me and follow the rules I have given you, I will send rain for your crops and trees. Your harvests will be so large that you will still have plenty from the last one when the next one comes in.

6-8. "You can go to sleep at night knowing that all will be well. No wild animal will come into your villages, and no wars will come into your country. If your enemies attack, I will help you. Five of you will defeat 100, and 100 will defeat 10,000.

9-13. "I will bless your children and will keep My promise to them, as I will to you. I will live among you. I will be your God, and you will be My people. I am the one who brought you out of Egypt and set you free.

14-17. "But if you do not listen to Me, I will have to discipline you. I will let disasters come. I will not stop you from getting sick. Your enemies will come and destroy your crops. I will let others rule your country. You will be so afraid that you will run as soon as you see one enemy soldier.

18-20. "If you still refuse to listen, but continue to do your own thing, I will have to discipline you more. I will stop the rain, and your land will become as hard as iron. No matter how hard you work, your crops will

not grow and your fruit trees will die.
21-22. "If you still refuse to listen and keep on doing your own thing, I will have to discipline you still more. I will let wild animals come into your villages and attack your sheep, goats, and cattle. There will be so many that you won't be able to kill them all, and you and your children will be too afraid to go outside.

23-26. "If you still do not listen, but continue to do what you want, I will have to discipline you more than that. I will let armies attack your country, surround your cities and starve you out. There will be so little food that ten families will have to share one loaf of bread.

27-29. "If after all this, you still refuse to listen and are determined to have your own way, I will remove My protection, and your enemies will come and destroy everything. You will have nothing to eat. You will get so hungry that you will even eat your own babies.

30-33. "I will let your enemies destroy your mountain retreats where you would go to worship your sun god. They will kill you and pile up your bodies on top of your gods. Your whole country will be in ruins. Then they will take you into exile and scatter you everywhere.

34-39. "While you are in exile, the land will finally rest and keep its sabbath as you were supposed to let it. And you will be so afraid that even the rustling of leaves will scare you. You will be afraid, but too weak to stand up against your enemies. You will be taken to foreign countries and will die there.

40-43. "But if you repent and confess your sins, I will forgive you. It was your own attitude that caused all this. If you come back and listen to Me, I will renew My covenant with you and bless your land, and it will enjoy its

sabbaths. But I cannot protect people determined to sin.

44-45. "In spite of this, I will not abandon you. I have not forgotten the promise I made when I brought you out of Egypt and set you free. I am still your God."

46. These are the laws and instructions the Lord gave to the people through Moses on Mount Sinai.

Making Promises

27 The Lord said to Moses, "Tell My people that if someone promises to do something for Me, but things change so he cannot keep his promise, he should bring a special offering to Me.

3-8. "For a man it should be fifty coins, for a woman thirty, for a young man twenty, for a young woman ten, for a boy five, for a girl three, for an old man fifteen, and for an old woman ten. If they are too poor, the priest may make an adjustment.

9-10. "If someone promises to give Me an animal and then wants to substitute another animal for it, both animals will belong to me.

11-13. "If the animal is not suitable for sacrifice, the priest will sell it, and the money will belong to Me. If the man changes his mind and wants to buy it back, he should pay what the priest says plus one fifth.

14-15. "If someone promises to give Me his house, the priest will determine its value. If the man changes his mind and wants to keep it, he will have to pay what the priest decides plus one fifth.

16-19. "If a man promises to give Me a piece of land, the priest will calculate its value depending on how large it is and what year it would be given. If the man changes his mind, he should pay what the priest decides plus one fifth.

20-21. "If he has sold the property but

wants to buy it back to give it to Me, he has lost his right to it. So at the Year of Jubilee, when all properties go back to the original owners, this property will come to Me for the priests.

22-25. "If a man buys a field and promises to give it to Me, but then changes his mind, the priest will assess the value of the land and that's the amount the man should give to Me. At the Year of Jubilee the land will go back to its original owners.

26-27. "All firstborn animals belong to Me. They cannot be used as offerings. If the animal is not suitable, the priest will sell it, and the money will belong to Me. If the man wants to keep it, he should pay what the priest decides plus one fifth.

28. "Whatever a man devotes to Me by an oath cannot be changed, and nothing can be substituted for it.

29. "In criminal cases, whatever the

court decides, it must be carried out. A man convicted of a crime cannot buy his freedom.

30-31. "The tithe belongs to Me, whether it is a tithe of money or of a harvest. If a man wants to buy the tithe harvest, he should pay Me that amount plus one fifth.

32. "One tenth of all the animals belong to Me. The man should put a mark on every tenth animal in the order that they come out of the pen.

33. "He should not put nine good ones first and let the tenth one be a bad one. Nor should he substitute another animal for the tenth one. If he tries to do this, both animals will belong to Me."

34. These are the laws and instructions God gave to the people through Moses when he was on the mountain with Him.

Numbers

INTRODUCTION: *This is the fourth book that Moses wrote. It's called Numbers because the people in each tribe were counted and recorded. From this book we learn that the Israelites disobeyed God and were not allowed to go into the Promised Land. So they had to camp in the wilderness for forty years until all who didn't obey God had died. Finally, the people were ready, and God led them to the borders of Canaan.*

Counting the People

1 The Lord spoke to Moses from the newly built sanctuary at the beginning of the second year after the children of Israel had come out of Egypt. He said, "List the people according to their tribes and families. Then count the men twenty years old and up who are fit for military service. I have chosen one man from each tribe to help you."

5-17. God told Moses the names of the men He had chosen, all of whom were leaders among the people. And Moses and Aaron were glad for their help.

18-19. That same day Moses told the people what the Lord had said. Then he and Aaron and the leaders began to count all the men who were twenty years old and up who were fit for military service. This was done while the people were still camped at Mount Sinai.

20-46. In round numbers there were 46,000 such men from the tribe of Reuben, 59,000 from Simeon, 45,000 from Gad, 74,000 from Judah, 54,000 from Issachar, 57,000 from Zebulun, 40,000 from Ephraim, 32,000 from Manasseh, 35,000 from Benjamin, 62,000 from Dan, 41,000 from Asher, and 53,000 from Naphtali.

47-51. The tribe of Levi was not in-

cluded. The Lord had said to Moses, "The Levites are to care for the sanctuary, take it down and carry it when it is time to move and then put it up again. No one else should touch the sanctuary. If he does, he shall be taken to the judges for sentencing."

52-53. He also said, "Once a campsite is chosen, the people should pitch their tents by tribes and families. Each tribe is to have its own flag. But the Levites should pitch their tents close to the sanctuary to protect it."

54. The people listened and did everything the Lord had told them to do.

The Campsites of the Tribes

2 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "The tribes are to pitch their tents on all four sides of the sanctuary.

4-16. "On the east side should be the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, with Judah being the lead tribe. On the south side will be the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad, with Reuben being the lead tribe.

17. "When it is time to move, Judah and the other two tribes should take the lead, followed by Reuben and the other two tribes. The tribe of Levi

shall be next, carrying the various parts of the sanctuary.

18-24. "The tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin should camp on the west side of the sanctuary, with Ephraim being the lead tribe. They should follow the Levites.

25-31. "The tribes of Dan, Asher, and Naphtali should camp on the north side, with Dan being the lead tribe. They should bring up the rear.

32-33. "All the tribes except the tribe of Levi should be ready for war."

34. The people did everything the Lord had said. Each tribe camped where they were supposed to, with the sanctuary in the middle. And wherever the people moved, they marched out in the order God told them.

The Levites

3 When the people had first camped at Mount Sinai, Aaron had had his four sons with him. But Nadab and Abihu had died. So that left only Eleazar and Ithamar.

5-10. It was also at Sinai that the Lord had said to Moses, "The tribe of Levi will be the support staff for Aaron and his sons. They will care for the sanctuary, including its transportation. But Aaron and his sons will serve as priests. Anyone trying to take the priesthood on himself should be sent to the judge for sentencing.

11-16. "The tribe of Levi is to serve Me in place of the firstborn sons of Israel that I spared in Egypt. I want you to count all the men and boys from the tribe of Levi. They are Mine." So Moses did.

17-26. Now, Jacob had twelve sons, and Levi was one of them. Levi had three sons. There were more than 7,000 who belonged to the family groups descended from his first son. They camped on the west side of the

sanctuary and were responsible for the roof coverings and curtains.

27-32. There were more than 8,000 who belonged to the family groups descended from Levi's second son. They camped on the south side of the sanctuary and were responsible for the furniture in the Holy Place. Aaron's son Eleazar was in charge.

33-37. There were more than 6,000 who belonged to the family groups descended from Levi's third son. They camped on the north side of the sanctuary and were responsible for all the framework.

38. The families of Moses and Aaron camped on the east side of the sanctuary near its entrance. Aaron and his sons—and no one else—were responsible for the services of the sanctuary.

39. There were 22,000 men and boys who belonged to the tribe of Levi.

40-41. Then the Lord said to Moses, "I want you to count all the firstborn sons, one month old and up, from all the tribes. The Levites will take their place. The animals of the Levites also belong to Me. They take the place of the firstborn animals from the rest of Israel that were not killed in Egypt."

42-43. Moses did what the Lord said. There were more than 200 more firstborn sons from the other tribes than there were Levites.

44-48. Then the Lord said to Moses, "The Levites and their animals are Mine. The more than 200 men from the other tribes must be paid with an offering. Give this money to Aaron for the sanctuary."

49-51. Moses did as the Lord said. He collected more than 1,000 silver coins and gave them to Aaron.

Sanctuary Duties

4 The Lord spoke to Moses again and said, "Count all the men descended from Levi's second son who are from thirty to fifty years old. This is the only age group that should carry the heavy sanctuary furniture.

5-6. "When it is time to break camp, Aaron and his sons are to take down the entrance curtain to the Most Holy Place and use it to cover the ark. They must put a leather covering over that and a dark-blue covering on next. Then they should put the carrying poles in place.

7-12. "They are to cover the bread table with a blue cloth, and put the dishes, silverware, and holy bread on top of it. They must spread a red cloth over that, and a leather covering over everything. They should snuff out the lamps and cover the seven-branched lamp stand with a blue cloth and then with a leather one. They should do the same with the altar of incense and all the utensils.

13-14. "In the courtyard they should remove all the ashes from the altar of sacrifice, then cover it with a purple cloth, place the utensils on it, and cover it with leather.

15-20. "After Aaron and his sons have done that, the Levites in charge of the furniture are to carry these things on carrying poles to the next place. They are not to watch Aaron and his sons cover these things or even peek underneath to look at them later or they will die."

21-28. The Lord also said, "Count all the men descended from Levi's first son who are from thirty to fifty years old. They are responsible for the roof coverings, the curtains, the ropes, the stakes, and so on. Aaron's son Ithamar is in charge of this.

29-33. "Next, count all the men de-

scended from Levi's third son who are from thirty to fifty years old. They are to carry the framework with its crossbars, posts, ropes, stakes, and all the other things for the courtyard and curtain fence. Ithamar is in charge of this also."

34-45. When Moses and Aaron counted, there were more than 2,700 men to help carry the furniture, more than 2,600 men to carry the roof coverings, curtains, and other things, and more than 3,000 men to carry the framework.

46-49. So with the help of the tribal leaders, Moses and Aaron finished counting all the Levites. There were more than 8,000 men who would be helping with the sanctuary. Each man was given his job. That is what the Lord told Moses and Aaron to do.

Sickness and Discipline

5 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Anyone who has a contagious disease should live outside the camp so other people don't catch it." Everyone who had such a disease was then asked to do so.

5-7. The Lord also said, "If a man does something to hurt another person, he has sinned. He is to confess his sin and pay for the damage he has caused plus a little extra.

8-10. "If the person who was hurt dies and leaves no close relatives to receive the payment, the man who hurt him must take the money to the sanctuary. The priest should take a ram and sacrifice it as a sin offering to remove the man's guilt. All such payments are sacred and are for the support of the priests."

11-15. The Lord also said, "If a husband thinks his wife is in love with another man and she denies it, they should go and see the priest and bring a grain offering with them.

16-22. "The priest will take a glass of water from the sanctuary basin and sprinkle a little dust in it. Then he should ask the wife to hold the grain offering and to tell the truth. If she lies, she will not be able to have children. She should say, 'I agree.'

23-28. "The priest should write this down. Then he should take the grain offering, hold it up to Me, and burn it on the altar. The wife should drink the sanctuary water, and if she lied, her stomach will swell, and she will not be able to have children. If she is innocent, nothing will happen.

29-31. "This is the test to see if a wife has been faithful to her husband or not. If she lies, she brings judgment on herself."

The Law of Dedication

6 Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Tell the people that if someone wants to dedicate himself to Me in a special way, this is what he should do. He should not drink alcohol or grape juice, nor should he eat fresh grapes or raisins. **5-8.** "A man should not cut his hair or shave. This is a sign of his special dedication. He should not touch a dead person, not even a dead family member.

9. "If someone near him suddenly dies and he touches him, he has broken his special dedication. He should wait a week and then shave his head and beard.

10-11. "He should bring two doves or pigeons to Me, one as a sin offering and the other as a consecration offering. He should dedicate himself to Me again and let his hair grow back.

12. "He should bring Me a lamb as a sin offering and start counting the days of his special dedication all over again.

13-17. "When the special days are

over, he should bring a ram as a consecration offering, a female lamb for a sin offering, and a ram for a peace offering. He should bring some bread with olive oil and grape juice.

18-20. "He should shave his head and beard and put the hair in the fire on the altar. The man should hold some of the meat and bread, then the priest should take it and hold them up to Me. This part of the offering will then belong to the priest.

21. "These are the rules for those who want to dedicate themselves to Me in a special way for a certain time."

22-23. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons that when they bless the people they should say, **24-26.** "'May the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord turn His face toward you and be gracious to you. The Lord look lovingly at you and give you peace.'

27. "This way, Aaron and his sons will remind the people of My love for them, and I will bless them."

The Leaders Bring Gifts

7 When Moses finished setting up the sanctuary, he anointed and dedicated all the furnishings to the Lord.

2-3. Then each of the tribal leaders brought gifts to the Lord. They gave six wagons to help carry parts of the sanctuary and twelve oxen to pull them.

4-10. The Lord said to Moses, "Accept these gifts and give them to the Levites for the work of the sanctuary." So Moses did what the Lord had said and divided the wagons and the oxen among the Levites according to the work they had to do.

11. Then the Lord said, "Each day for twelve days one leader should bring his tribe's offering to Me for the dedication of the sanctuary."

12-14. The first day the leader of the tribe of Judah brought a silver dish and a silver bowl with flour, oil, and grain, and a golden bowl with incense.

15-17. He also brought a young bull, a ram, and a lamb as a consecration offering; a young goat for a sin offering; and two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five lambs as a peace offering.

18-83. Each day following, one of the tribal leaders brought the same gifts and offerings to the Lord. The leader from the tribe of Issachar was next, then Zebulun, Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, and Naphtali.

84-88. The leaders brought all these gifts and offerings to the Lord for the dedication of the sanctuary. There were twelve silver dishes and bowls; twelve golden bowls; and the young bulls, rams, goats, and lambs for the different offerings.

89. When Moses went into the sanctuary after it was dedicated, he heard the voice of God speaking to him from between the golden angels on the ark.

The Dedication of the Levites

8 The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron to set the seven-branched lamp against the wall so it will light the whole room." So that's what Aaron did. The lamp was very heavy because it was made of one large piece of solid gold.

5-9. The Lord spoke to Moses again and said, "Dedicate the Levites to Me. Have them shave and wash their clothes. Then they should bring a young bull with some grain, flour, and olive oil as a consecration offering, and a young bull as a sin offering to the sanctuary as the people watch.

10-13. "The tribal leaders will come into the courtyard and lay their hands on the heads of the Levites.

Then the Levites will lay their hands on the two bulls that Aaron will sacrifice. Finally, the Levites will stand before Aaron, and he will dedicate them to Me.

14-19. "This should take place before the Levites begin their sanctuary work. They have taken the place of the firstborn sons that were not killed in Egypt. No one is to work at the sanctuary except the Levites."

20-22. So Moses and Aaron dedicated the Levites as the Lord had said, and the Levites began their work at the sanctuary.

23-26. Then the Lord spoke to Moses again and said, "The Levites will begin working at the sanctuary at the age of twenty-five and will retire at the age of fifty. Afterward they may volunteer to help, but they should not be expected to do the heavy lifting."

The Passover

9 The beginning of the second year after they left Egypt, the Lord said to Moses, "Have the people keep the Passover, as they did a year ago before they left Egypt.

3-4. "On the fourteenth of the first month beginning at sunset the Passover begins. The people know what they need to do." Then Moses told the people to start getting ready.

5-8. So the people kept the Passover, as the Lord asked them to. But there were some who had touched a dead body and couldn't participate. They asked Moses if they could at least offer a sacrifice. Moses said, "Let me ask the Lord."

9-14. The Lord said, "If they have touched a dead body or were traveling and couldn't get back home in time, they may keep the Passover and bring their offering the next month. They need to be sure not to miss it

the second time. If they do, they are no longer a part of My people. This same rule applies to an Israelite or to a foreigner living among you."

15-16. After Moses finished everything, the Lord's cloud stood over the sanctuary. It was the same pillar of cloud that had guided the people out of Egypt. At night it looked like it was on fire.

17-18. When it moved, the people broke camp and followed it. When it stopped, they stopped and pitched camp.

19-23. Sometimes the cloud wouldn't move for weeks. Other times it would stay over the sanctuary only a few days or even one night. Whatever the cloud did, the people did. If it stayed a year, they stayed a year. And they followed all the rules that Moses gave them.

Silver Trumpets

10 Again the Lord spoke to Moses and said, "Make two silver trumpets. Give a long blast on both to call the people to worship, and a long blast on one to call the leaders together.

5-7. "Give a series of short blasts on both trumpets as a signal to break camp. At the first short blast the three tribes to the east of the sanctuary should break camp. Each time the trumpets sound, the tribes to the south, then west, and then north should break camp.

8-10. "Only Aaron and his sons are to blow the trumpets. When enemies attack, the trumpets should be used as a call to war. This will also be a sign for the Lord to come and help you. And they should blow the trumpets on your festivals to remind the people that I am the Lord their God."

The People Leave Sinai

11-16. A little more than a year after the children of Israel came out of Egypt, the Lord's cloud lifted, and the people broke camp and left Mount Sinai. They camped at different places, and each time they moved, the tribe of Judah would take the lead, followed by the tribes of Issachar and Zebulun.

17-20. The Levites would take down the sanctuary and use wagons to carry the heavy items. Then the tribes of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad would follow.

21-24. Other Levites would carry the furniture of the sanctuary on their shoulders, and the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin would follow.

25-28. The last three tribes to break camp and move out would be Dan, Asher, and Naphtali. This would be the order with three tribes leading out and three tribes protecting the rear.

29-30. It was here that Moses asked Hobab his brother-in-law to come with them to Canaan. He answered, "Thank you. But now that you're safely out of Egypt and things are organized, we'll be on our way back home."

31-32. Moses said, "Please come along. You can be a big help to us. The Lord will bless you for it." Then Hobab changed his mind and agreed to go with Moses.

33-34. So the people broke camp and traveled for three days with the Lord's cloud in the lead. In the daytime it protected the people from the sun, and at night it gave them light and heat.

35-36. When the Levites picked up the ark, that was the signal to move forward. Moses would say, "Go with us, Lord, and protect us from our enemies." When the Levites put down the ark, he would say, "Thank You, Lord, for watching over all of us."

The People Complain

11 It wasn't long before some of the people, mostly foreigners, started to complain. The Lord knew this had to be stopped or it would get out of hand. One day fire flashed from the cloud and struck some of the people, and they died.

2-3. The rest of the people cried out for help. Moses prayed for them, and the fire stopped. So he called the campsite Place of Burning, because of the fire of the Lord.

4-6. Soon the foreigners who had joined the Israelites began to complain again. They said, "If only we had some real food to eat. In Egypt we had all the meat we wanted, cucumbers, melons, and garlic. All we have here is manna, and we're getting tired of it."

7-9. The manna looked like a tiny white pea. Every morning the people would get what they needed to make bread or cereal. It tasted good, as though it had been made with oil and honey. Every night the Lord would send a fresh supply.

10-15. When Moses heard the people crying and complaining, he prayed, "Lord, why have You put all this on me? These people want me to be their nurse. They keep crying, 'Feed me! Feed me!' This is too much for me. It would be easier to die than to live with this."

16-17. The Lord said, "You are not the father of these people. I am. I have heard your prayer. Go and pick seventy good men and bring them to the sanctuary. I will give them some of the power I have given to you, and they will be your helpers."

18-20. "Also tell the people that I have heard their cry for meat. Tomorrow I will give them all the meat they can eat every day for a month. But they will complain again, because they would

rather be slaves and have meat than to enjoy a simple diet and be free."

21-22. Moses replied, "Lord, there are more than 500,000 men, not counting women and children. Where are You going to get enough meat to feed all these people? Even if we killed all our animals or had all the fish in the Red Sea, it wouldn't be enough."

23. The Lord said, "Are you saying there are things I can't do? Tomorrow you will get your answer. Tell the people what I've said."

24-25. Moses told the people what the Lord had said. He then picked seventy men to come to the sanctuary. When they got there, the Lord's cloud covered them, and God took some of the power from Moses and gave it to them. Then they were filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, but only for that day.

26-28. Now, two of the men didn't feel worthy to come to the sanctuary. But they also prophesied. When Joshua saw this, he ran to Moses and said, "There are two men in the camp praising the Lord as if they're in vision! We need to stop this before it gets out of hand!"

29-30. Moses said, "Are you zealous for my sake? I wish the power of the Holy Spirit would come on all of God's people so they would praise the Lord like that."

31-32. Suddenly a strong wind began to blow and brought in thousands of game birds. They flew about three feet off the ground, and people began to catch them. They did that all day and into the night. Then they took the feathers off, cut up the meat, and dried it in the sun. Each family had enough to last them a whole month.

33-35. Some people ate the meat uncooked, and they got sick and died. So they called the place Graves of

Overeating, because those who would rather be slaves than to be without meat were buried there. Then the people broke camp and moved on.

Aaron and Miriam

12 About this time Moses' sister and brother, Miriam and Aaron, started complaining. They were jealous that God had given Moses so much authority. And they didn't like his foreign wife.

2. They said to themselves, "God has used us to help His people too. Why does Moses think he's the only one who can speak for God?" And the Lord heard them.

3. When Moses heard about it, he said nothing, because he was very humble—the meekest man on earth.

4-5. Then the Lord asked all three of them to come to the entrance of the sanctuary. The Lord's cloud settled over them, and God asked Miriam and Aaron to step forward.

6. He said, "Listen to Me! When I choose someone to be a prophet, I speak to him in visions and dreams.

7-8. "But Moses is different. I put him in charge of My people, and he has done everything I told him to do. I speak to him face to face. Why are you jealous of him when he is only doing what he is told? Is that the right way to feel?"

9. The Lord was very displeased, especially with Miriam, because she had started it all. Then the Lord's cloud lifted.

10. When it did, Miriam was covered with leprosy. When Aaron saw her, he felt he too had sinned by listening to her.

11-12. He pleaded with Moses, "Please forgive us! It was wrong for us to be jealous of you. We have sinned against you and the Lord. Miriam looks as if she's dying!"

13. Then Moses prayed, "O Lord, please forgive my sister for what she has done, and heal her!"

14. The Lord said, "If a daughter dishonors her father by her sin, she must move out of the camp and bear her shame for seven days. Why should it not be the same for Me? Send Miriam out of the camp for one week. Then she can return."

15-16. Miriam did as she was told. And the people did not break camp until she was healed and came back. Then they moved on to the next place.

Twelve Spies

13 When the people got near the land of Canaan, the Lord said to Moses, "Choose one man from each tribe and let them go and explore the land and bring back a good report to encourage the people." Moses did that. Every tribe was represented.

17-20. Moses told the twelve spies, "Go into the southern part of the land first, and then into the mountains. Find out what the people are like, how big their cities are, and what the land is like. Then come and tell us."

21-24. So the men left. They explored the land and brought back with them samples of figs and other fruit and a branch full of clusters of large grapes. The branch was so heavy that it took a pole and two men to carry it.

25-29. It took the men forty days to explore the land. When they came back they said to Moses, "The country is beautiful. It's rich and fertile, full of all kinds of delicious fruit. The problem is that the people are very powerful. And their cities are protected by such high walls that there is no way the Lord can give us that land."

30. When the people heard that, they were afraid and criticized Moses for

taking them out of Egypt. Then Joshua and Caleb said, "If God wants us to have this land, He can give it to us! Look at what He's done for us already!"

31. The other men said, "That's impossible. The people there are giants. There's no way we can do it."

32-33. Then they went among the people and exaggerated their stories to make things look even worse. They told them that the land wasn't big enough to feed them all, and that the people were so big and strong they felt like grasshoppers next to them. "No one," they said, "could defeat these giants."

The People Refuse to Go

14 The people believed the exaggerated report of the ten spies. That night they complained and cried about having to leave Egypt and obey God.

2. The next morning they went to Moses and Aaron and said, "We should have stayed in Egypt. But it's better to die out here in the wilderness than to be captured by giants!"

3-4. "Why did the Lord tell us that He would give us the land of Canaan and then bring us out here to die? These giants will kill us, and our women and children will become their playthings." Then they said to each other, "Let's choose a new leader and go back to Egypt!"

5-6. Moses and Aaron fell on their knees and bowed their heads to the ground. And Joshua and Caleb, the other two spies, tore their robes in grief.

7-9. They said, "The land we saw is really good. If the Lord wants us to have it, He will give it to us! Don't rebel against Him and accuse Him of lying to us. He didn't bring us out here to be killed. Let's not be afraid. With His help we can win. Nothing is impossible with the Lord!"

10. But the people would not listen. They were determined to go back to Egypt and were ready to kill Caleb and Joshua for trying to stop them. Suddenly the Lord's presence appeared above the sanctuary.

11-12. The Lord said to Moses, "How many times will these people accuse Me of lying to them? How long will they refuse to trust Me after all I have done for them? There is reason enough to destroy them all and make a nation of people from your descendants."

13-15. Moses said, "No, Lord! If You do that, what will the Egyptians say? They'll call You the God of death! Other countries have already heard about all the great things You have done. They'll say, 'God could bring them only so far. Then He killed them.'"

16-19. "Lord, they need to see how kind You are. You told me Yourself that You are not an angry God, that You love people and are ready to forgive generation after generation. Please forgive us as You have done before."

20-23. The Lord said, "I'll forgive them. But not one of those who said I lied to them will enter the land of Canaan. They saw what miracles I used to bring them out of Egypt, yet they refuse to believe Me. Ten times they tested My love, and I gave them every reason to trust Me. Yet they still don't. Not one of those will go into Canaan."

24-25. "But Caleb and Joshua believe what I say. I will bring them and those who trust Me into Canaan, just as I said I would. Tomorrow morning I want you to break camp and head back toward Egypt."

26-28. Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "How long will these people not believe what I tell them? All they do is complain about Me. Tell them that I will let things happen the way they believed."

29-30. "Everyone twenty years and older who complained about Me will die before I take the people into Canaan. The only exceptions will be Caleb and Joshua, because they believed what I said.

31-33. "Tell the people that I will take into the land of Canaan the children they were so afraid would be captured and treated as playthings. The people will have to camp for the next forty years until all those die who did not believe Me.

34-35. "It took forty days to explore the land, and it will be matched by forty years, each day for a year. I will discipline My people for not trusting Me after all I have done for them."

36-38. Then the ten men who had given the false report and scared the people came down with a terrible sickness and died. Only Caleb and Joshua lived.

39-40. When Moses told the people what the Lord had said about not going into Canaan, they became very sad. Then they decided to go and fight. They said, "We have sinned against the Lord. We will make up for it by taking Canaan now."

41-43. Moses said, "Why are you disobeying the Lord again? You can't do this on your own. It will never work. The Lord will not go with you. You will be attacked, and hundreds of you will die. God wants to bring you into Canaan the same way He took you out of Egypt, by miracles, not by fighting."

44-45. But the people would not listen, and marched toward the hill country. Then the Canaanites came down from the hills and attacked them, and hundreds of God's people were killed.

Rules for Offerings

15 After their men had been defeated, the Lord said to Moses, "Tell the people that when they do come into the land of Canaan and bring offerings to Me from their flocks and herds, they should also bring some flour, oil, and grape juice.

11-16. "When they bring more than one animal, some flour, oil, and grape juice should go with each animal. These rules also apply to foreigners living among you. Everyone is the same before the Lord."

17-21. The Lord spoke to Moses again and said, "Tell the people that when they come into Canaan they should not forget Me. Every year they should bring Me a grain offering from their harvests, together with fresh bread made from new flour. This is a thanksgiving offering and will help them remember what I have done for them.

22-23. "If someone does not intend to break these rules but does so, he is still guilty. When it is pointed out to him, he should admit his wrong and bring a sin offering, and he will be forgiven.

24-28. "If the people as a whole break these rules but did not intend to do so, they too are guilty. When it is pointed out to the people, they should admit that they did wrong. The priest should bring a sin offering, and the people will be forgiven.

29. "These same rules apply to foreigners living among you. There is no excuse for not knowing the rules for bringing offerings.

30-31. "If someone deliberately breaks these rules to show contempt for Me, and does so publicly, he is to be arrested. If found guilty, he should be sentenced to death. He has brought this on himself."

Sabbathkeeping

32-34. While the people were still camping in the wilderness, a man went out to gather wood on the Sabbath when he didn't need to. The people brought him to Moses to ask the Lord what to do.

35-36. The Lord said, "He should be taken to court, and if proven guilty, he should be sentenced to death. If he did this deliberately to show contempt for My commandments and the Sabbath, he has brought it on himself."

37-39. The Lord spoke to Moses again, saying, "Tell My people to put little blue tassels on the bottom of their robes. These tassels will remind them that they belong to Me and that they are to keep My commandments."

40-41. "They should obey Me because they love Me. That is what makes them My people. I am the One who brought them out of Egypt and set them free. I am the Lord who loves them."

Rebellion

16 Sometime later three men started a rebellion. Soon 250 other men joined them. They went to see Moses and Aaron and said, "You two have too much authority. We're all equal. So why shouldn't we have the same authority as you have?"

4-7. When Moses heard that, he fell on his knees and talked to the Lord. Then he got up and said to the group, "Tomorrow morning the Lord will give you an answer. We will all go to the sanctuary, and the one whom the Lord will call to step forward is the new leader."

8-11. Then Moses turned to Korah, the leader of the group, and said, "You're a Levite and already working in the sanctuary. God has been good to you. But you want to take Aaron's place. That's going against the Lord who appointed Aaron."

12-14. Then Moses sent for the other two men to come to the sanctuary. They said, "Who do you think you are, telling us what to do? You promised to take us to the beautiful and fertile land of Canaan, and here we are in the wilderness. Why should we listen to you?" And they refused to go.

15. Moses was really hurt. He talked to the Lord and said, "Lord, they're not talking against me, but against You, because You appointed me. They need to repent before they bring any more offerings to You. I haven't done a thing to them."

16-19. Then he said to Korah, "Remember, tomorrow morning have all your men come to the sanctuary. Aaron and I will be there. Each of you bring a censer of hot coals and incense." So that's what they did. Suddenly the light of the Lord's presence appeared. It was so bright the whole camp could see it.

20-24. The Lord said to Moses, "Move to one side. I want to destroy all of them." Moses and Aaron fell on their knees and said, "Lord, don't destroy everyone! It's only one man who really started all this!" The Lord said, "Then tell everyone else to get away from Korah and his two friends."

25-27. Moses and Aaron followed. Then Korah went back to camp, and when they got there, they saw Korah talking to his friends Dathan and Abiram. Moses said, "Move back from these men, or you'll be destroyed with them." The people did, but the men's families didn't.

28-30. Then Moses said to the three men and their families, "If nothing happens in the next few minutes, then the Lord has not chosen us to be your leaders. But if the earth suddenly opens up and swallows all of you, then you are the ones who started this rebellion."

31-35. No sooner did Moses finish speaking than the ground opened up, and the three men and their families fell in. Then the ground closed again. When the people saw this, they got scared and ran, but not Korah's 250 followers. Then fire flashed from the Lord's cloud, and they too were destroyed.

36-40. The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron's son Eleazar to collect the censers of all these men and hammer them into a bronze covering for the altar. This will remind people not to listen to men like that." No one dared try to take Aaron's place again.

41-45. The next day the people blamed Moses and Aaron for what had happened. They formed a delegation and started toward the sanctuary. Then the light of the Lord's presence appeared, and He said to Moses, "Get out of the way so I can destroy these rebels." Moses and Aaron fell on their knees and pleaded with the Lord not to do so.

46-48. Then Moses said to Aaron, "Quick! Get your censer with hot coals and incense and hurry toward the people! I can see that a plague has started!" Aaron ran among the people waving his censer as he did during worship, and the plague stopped.

49-50. By the time the plague was over, more than 14,000 people had died. Then Aaron returned to the sanctuary, where he found his brother Moses waiting.

Aaron's Rod

17 The Lord said to Moses, "Tell the leader of each tribe to bring Me a short walking stick. Each man should write his name on it, and Aaron should do the same.

3-5. "Put these walking sticks in front of the ark in the Most Holy Place.

Tomorrow morning the stick of the man I have chosen will have blossoms and almonds on it. That should settle the question of who is the rightful high priest."

6-7. Moses spoke to the tribal leaders, and each man brought his walking stick with his name on it. Aaron brought his, too. Then Moses put them in front of the ark, as the Lord had said.

8-9. The next morning Moses went into the sanctuary and saw that Aaron's stick had blossoms and ripe almonds on it! He brought out all the sticks and showed them to the leaders. Each man looked to see if his stick had blossoms and almonds on it, but none of them did, except Aaron's.

10-11. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Put Aaron's stick back into the ark as a reminder of what happened today. If this does not end their questions about Aaron's leadership, they too will die." Moses obeyed and did what the Lord said.

12-13. The tribal leaders said to Moses, "Will we also die, as did Korah and his friends? Will it happen here in front of the sanctuary or back in front of our tents?" They were really scared. But no one dared question Aaron's leadership again.

Duties of Priests and Levites

18 After this the Lord said to Aaron, "You and your sons have the responsibilities of the priesthood and the work of the sanctuary. The Levites are your helpers. They are not to do the duties of priests. Only you and your sons are to do that.

8-13. "I have personally chosen you to be in charge of the offerings and the special gifts that the people bring. And part of these offerings are for you and your family.

14-19. "Every firstborn son and the firstborn of all the clean animals belong to Me. The sons are to be bought from Me, but the animals are to be sacrificed. Parts of these offerings are for you and your family. This arrangement is between Me and those who will serve as priests for generations to come.

20. "I have not given you farms or property as I have the people. Doing My work is your inheritance. You are to care for the spiritual needs of My people.

21-24. "The tithe belongs to the Levites. I have not given them farms or property, because they are to help you. They are to live off the tithe. This arrangement is for generations to come."

25-27. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Tell the Levites that they should also pay tithe and give it to Aaron. These tithes will be in place of tithes of animals and grain that farmers bring.

28-32. "When they receive these kinds of tithes from the people, a tenth of it goes to Aaron. The rest is theirs. It is their reward for working at the sanctuary. They may eat their share of these offerings anywhere they choose. Just be sure to treat whatever the people bring to Me as holy."

Staying Spiritually Clean

19 Again the Lord spoke to Moses and said, "This is what I want the people to do to cleanse themselves spiritually. They should bring a red calf to the priest, who is to take a man with him to kill the animal outside the camp and burn its body.

3-6. "The priest should dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times toward the sanctuary. He should throw a small piece of cedarwood, a twig of hyssop, and a little piece of red wool in the fire too.

7-10. "Then the priest should bathe and wash his clothes before coming back into camp. The man who kills the animal and the man who saves the ashes should do the same thing. All three are unfit to come to the sanctuary until after sundown.

11-16. "Anyone who touches a dead body either at home or in the field is unfit to come to the sanctuary for one week. He should purify himself on the third and seventh days after this happens. Anyone who does not do this must be separated from My people.

17-19. "To purify someone spiritually, a man should be appointed to sprinkle some of the ashes of the red calf in a jar of clear water. Then he should dip a hyssop twig in it and sprinkle the water on the tent where the body was or on the man who touched a body in the field. This should be done on different days.

20-22. "Anyone who needs to do this but doesn't must be separated from My people. He would defile My sanctuary. The man who prepared the purification water should bathe and wash his clothes. He should not come to the sanctuary until after sundown. This rule also applies to anyone who touches anything the unclean person touches."

Moses Sins

20 The people broke camp and followed the Lord's leading. At the next place Miriam, the sister of Moses, died.

2. It was here that the people complained to Moses and Aaron about not having enough water.

3-5. The people said, "It would have been better for us to die with Korah and his friends when the ground opened and swallowed them than to die of thirst. You brought us out here to die, didn't you? Why didn't you

leave us in Egypt? There's nothing out here—no figs, grapes, or anything, not even water!"

6-8. When Moses and Aaron heard that, they went to the sanctuary, fell on their knees, and prayed. Then the light of the Lord appeared, and He said to Moses, "Get up, take the shepherd's rod, and have the people come to the big rock where My cloud will be. Tell the rock to give you water, and it will."

9-11. Moses took the shepherd's rod from the sanctuary and led the people to the big rock. When they got there Moses said, "Listen to me, you rebels! Do I have to bring water out of this rock for you?" He was angry. So instead of talking to the rock, he took the shepherd's rod and hit the rock twice. A stream of water gushed out, enough for all the people and all their animals.

12. Then the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you got angry and hit the rock instead of talking to it as I told you, and also because you took credit to yourselves for giving the people water, I will not let you go into the Promised Land."

13. From then on the place was called Contention because of what the people had done. All this happened before the Lord took them into Canaan.

The King of Edom

14-17. Moses felt sorry for what he had done, and the Lord forgave him. Then God told him to move forward toward the Promised Land. So Moses sent a message to the king of Edom, saying, "We were slaves in Egypt, and the Lord set us free. Please let us pass through your country on the way to Canaan. We'll stay on the road and won't touch a thing."

18-19. The king sent a message back

saying, "Do not get on my road. If you try, I will kill all of you." Moses sent back this message: "We give our word that we will stay on the road and not touch a thing. If anyone so much as drinks your water, we will pay for it."

20-21. The king said, "I will not let you go through my country!" Then he sent his army to the border to show that he meant what he said. So the people turned back and went around his little country to get to the land of Canaan.

Aaron Dies

22. The people made their way along the border of Edom until they got to Mount Hor.

23-24. After they had set up camp, the Lord said to Moses, "It is time for your brother, Aaron, to die. I will not let him go into Canaan either, because he got angry at the big rock, just as you did."

25-26. "Take Aaron's son Eleazar, and the three of you come up the mountain. Then take Aaron's priestly robes and put them on his son. Aaron will die, and you will bury him there."

27-28. Moses did what the Lord had said. He took Aaron and Eleazar, and the three of them went up the mountain. Moses took the priestly robes from Aaron and put them on his son, as the Lord said. Then Aaron got sleepy and lay down and died, and they buried him there.

29. When they came down and told the people what had happened, they all wept and mourned for Aaron for a whole month.

Attack

21 While the people were camped close to Canaan, they were attacked by one of the kings, and some of the people were captured.

2-3. The Israelites earnestly prayed for deliverance. Then they counterattacked. The Lord heard their prayers and helped them. They defeated the king, rescued their brothers, and destroyed the city.

The Brass Serpent

4. After that, they made their way around the little country of Edom, hoping to cross over into Canaan. But soon the people started complaining again.

5. They said to Moses, "Why did you bring us out here? You want us to die, don't you? There's nothing to eat out here except this awful manna. We're sick and tired of it!"

6. The Lord heard their complaints and decided to let them have something else to think about. So He stopped protecting them, and soon poisonous snakes came into the camp. Many people were bitten, and some of them died.

7. The people rushed to see Moses and said, "We have sinned! Please ask the Lord to protect us from these snakes!"

8. Moses prayed, and the Lord heard his prayers. He said to Moses, "Make a brass serpent and put it on a tall pole. Those who look to it in faith will be healed."

9. Moses did as he was told. He shaped a piece of brass into a snake and placed it on a tall pole. Those who looked at it in faith were healed. Those who didn't died.

Two Kings Defeated

10-16. After this the people moved on toward Canaan until they reached a place called Dry Wells. The Lord said, "I want you to camp here. I will fill these dry wells with water." And He did.

17-20. The people burst out singing, "Princes and kings dug these wells,

only to have them go dry. But our God has filled them all!" From here they moved on to the valley of Moab. There the top of Mount Pisgah overlooks the land of Canaan.

21-23. Moses sent a message to the king of the area and said, "Please let us pass through your little country. We will stay on the road and will not touch a thing." But the king refused. He called out his troops and attacked the Israelites.

24-26. Israel fought back and defeated the king. They took the whole country, including Heshbon, its fortified capital.

27-32. Then they wrote a victory song to remember what the Lord had done for them. Some of the people liked the country so well that they decided to settle there. So Moses sent some men to check out the rest of the country to defeat any enemy troops that were left.

33-35. From here the people continued toward Canaan. Soon they were attacked by another king. The Lord said, "Don't be afraid. I will help you defeat this king, too." The Israelites fought back and defeated that king and took over his land. And some of the people decided to settle there.

Balaam and the Donkey

22 Next the people headed toward the Jordan River across from the city of Jericho in the land of Canaan.

2-3. When Balak, another king in the area, learned how many Israelites there were and heard that they had defeated two kings, he got scared.

4. So he sent word to the little neighboring country and said, "There are so many Israelites that we can't fight them. What do you think we should do?"

5-6. They got together and decided

to use magic. So Balak sent a message to Balaam, a false prophet. The letter said, "A small nation of people left Egypt and is camped on my border. They are powerful and have already defeated two kings. Come and curse them for me so I can conquer them."

7-8. A delegation from both countries took the letter to Balaam and offered to pay him if he would come and curse the Hebrews. Balaam read the letter and said, "Stay overnight, and I'll ask the Lord what to do." They agreed.

9-11. That night the Lord said to Balaam, "What do these men want? Where are they from?" Balaam answered, "They're from Moab and Midian. They want me to come and curse the Hebrew people so they can defeat them."

12-14. The Lord said, "I do not want you to go. The Hebrews are Mine, and I have blessed them." The next morning Balaam told the men that he couldn't do it. So they went back home and told the king.

15-17. Then the king decided to send even more important men to Balaam. They asked him to reconsider and offered to pay him whatever he wanted, because the king really wanted to defeat the Israelites.

18-21. Balaam said, "Even if you give me a house full of gold, I can't go unless the Lord says so. Stay overnight and I'll ask Him again. Maybe He's changed His mind." That night the Lord said to Balaam, "I do not want you to go. But if you insist, I'll let you have your way. However, you will say only what I want to you say." By the time Balaam got up, the delegation had gone. So he saddled his donkey and went after them.

22. It was obvious that Balaam was

ready to curse Israel just to get the money. So God sent an angel to meet him and his donkey.

23. The Lord opened the donkey's eyes, and it saw the angel standing in the road with a sword in his hand. The donkey went off the road to get around the angel, but Balaam was in a hurry and got mad. He beat the donkey until it got back on the road.

24-25. So the angel went and stood where there was a stone fence on both sides of the road. When the donkey saw the angel, it tried to squeeze by and scraped Balaam's leg against the stones. Balaam beat the donkey even more than before.

26-27. Then the angel went to a very narrow place in the road where there was no way to pass. When the donkey saw the angel, it stopped and lay down, with Balaam still on. This really made him mad. He beat the donkey so hard that it cried for help.

28-30. Then God made the donkey talk. It said to Balaam, "Why are you beating me?" Balaam answered, "Three times you have refused to keep going. If I had a sword, I would kill you." The donkey replied, "Haven't I always done what you said?" Balaam answered, "Yes."

31. Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel standing before him with a sword in his hand. Balaam fell on his knees in front of the angel, scared to death.

32-33. The angel said, "Why are you so mad at your donkey? And why did you beat it so hard? The Lord sent me to stop you from disobeying Him. He's the one who opened the donkey's eyes. If she had come straight at me, both of you would be dead."

34. Then Balaam cried out, "I have sinned against the Lord. I didn't know you were standing in the road.

If you want me to, I'll turn around and go back home."

35. The angel said, "Since you're so eager, the Lord says you may go, but you will say only what He wants you to say." Then the angel disappeared.

36-38. When the king got word that Balaam was coming, he went to meet him and said, "Welcome! Why didn't you come the first time? Didn't I offer you enough money? I'll pay you whatever you want." Balaam said, "Well, I'm here. But I can say only what the Lord wants me to say."

39. Then the king took Balaam to the top of one of the smaller mountains where they worshiped an idol called Baal. He wanted to give Balaam a good view of the camp of the Israelites before he cursed them.

40. The king offered some sheep and young bulls to his idol and asked Balaam and the princes to join him for the sacrificial meal. And they did.

41. The next day the king took Balaam to another high place so he could get an even better look at Israel.

Balaam's Prophecy

23 Then Balaam said to the king, "Have your men build seven altars and bring me seven bulls and seven rams." That's what the king did. And they sacrificed one of each animal on each of the seven altars.

3. After the sacrifices had been made, Balaam said to the king, "Let me go up a little higher and ask the Lord what He wants me to do. I'll come back and tell you what He says."

4. He said to the Lord, "Lord, we have built seven altars and sacrificed a bull and a ram on each. I'm sure You must be pleased."

5. The Lord answered Balaam, "Go back to the king, and I'll tell you what to say."

6-10. So Balaam went back and said to the king, "You brought me here to curse Israel. How can I curse what God has blessed? I had a good look at their camp. They are so orderly. You can tell that they are different from other people. And there are so many of them. When I die, I hope my future will be as certain as theirs."

11-12. The king said, "Do you know what you just did? You blessed these people! You didn't curse them at all!" Balaam answered, "I wanted to curse them, but I couldn't."

13. Then the king took Balaam to a place from which he could see only a part of Israel, hoping he would at least curse that part.

14-15. Again he had seven altars built and sacrificed seven bulls and rams. Then Balaam said, "Stay here, and let me go and talk to the Lord."

16. Again the Lord told him what to say and sent him back to the king. The king asked what the Lord had said.

17-20. Balaam said to the king, "God is not like a man. He doesn't lie, nor can He be made to change His mind. What He says, He does. He has told me to bless Israel, and I cannot change it."

21-24. "Israel's future is sure. As long as they obey the Lord, He will bless them. He's their king! He brought them out of Egypt, and He will protect them. No witchcraft or curse can change that. Israel will prosper. People will say, 'Look what God has done for them!' Israel is like a mighty lion—it will always get what it goes after."

25-26. The king got angry and said, "If you can't curse Israel, at least don't keep on blessing them!" Balaam replied, "I told you that I can prophesy only what the Lord tells me to say."

27-30. Then the king took Balaam to still another place, hoping that God

would change His mind and let Balaam curse Israel from there. Then Balaam said, "Let's do what we did before, build seven altars and sacrifice seven bulls and rams." The king agreed, and that's what they did.

Balaam's Prophecy

24 Balaam was finally sure that God wanted him to bless Israel, not curse it. Again he looked at the camp of Israel and noticed how clean and orderly it was.

3-4. Then the Holy Spirit took hold of him, and he said, "When the word of the Lord came to me, I slumped to the ground, and with eyes wide open I had a vision. I saw the greatness of Israel.

5-7. "Israel's tents are beautiful. The camp is like a fruitful garden planted by a river, like stately trees growing beside a lake. Israel will be blessed by the Lord wherever they make their home. Their seeds will grow, and their harvests will be great. They will be respected by all nations.

8-9. "God brought them out of Egypt, and He is on their side. He will help them defeat entire armies. Their arrows will pierce the hearts of their enemies. Israel is like a sleeping lion. No one dares to waken it. Whoever blesses Israel will be blessed, and whoever curses Israel will be cursed."

10-11. When the king heard that, he became very angry and shouted, "I asked you to curse Israel, and you've blessed them three times! Get out of here and go back home! And forget about getting paid!"

12-14. Balaam answered, "I told the men who came to see me that I could say only what the Lord would tell me, no matter how much money they offered me. I'll go back home, but before I go, let me tell you one more thing that God showed me in vision.

15-17. "When I lay on the ground with my eyes wide open, I saw Someone who is not yet born become the king of Israel. I saw Him rescue His people from their enemies.

18-19. "Israel will take the land of Canaan and will not be defeated. One with great authority will come out of Israel and will be their king. He will destroy all their enemies, and no one will be left.

20-22. "Strong nations will come and attack Israel, but they will be defeated. Other nations will take the side of Israel and defeat their enemies for them.

23-24. "Who can stand up against the Lord and His people? Ships will come against Israel's enemies, and those nations will perish and be no more."

25. Then Balaam saddled his donkey and went back home. And the king went back to his palace.

Israel Tempted

25 The Israelites were still camped by the Moabite border ready to move on to Canaan. Then the king decided to invite the Hebrew leaders to a friendship festival. They ate together and then had drinking parties with the Moabite men and women and ended up worshipping the god Baal. The Lord was not happy with what they did.

4. He said to Moses, "Bring these men to justice. They must be sentenced and executed publicly for what they have done so openly. This is the only way to stop this sort of thing. Otherwise, I cannot bless the people the way I want to."

5. Moses called for the judges and said, "You need to try these men. They went to a pagan religious festival, got drunk, slept with Moabite women, and worshiped the god Baal."

6. As these leaders were being tried, a plague broke out among the people. Moses met the people at the sanctuary, and together they wept and prayed to the Lord for help. Just then one of the leaders brought his Midianite girlfriend into camp and took her to his tent.

7-9. Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, saw this, and followed them. When he found them hugging and kissing with the tent wide open, he drove his spear through both of them. Instantly the plague stopped. By then thousands had died, all those who said there was nothing wrong with what these leaders had done.

10-13. Then the Lord told Moses, "Because justice was done, I stopped the plague. And I will bless Phinehas and his family. He will always be a priest, because he was not afraid to take a stand against sin."

14-15. The man who brought the woman into camp was Zimri, and the woman was Cozbi, a daughter of one of the Midianite leaders.

16-18. Then the Lord said to Moses, "The Midianites and the Moabites worked together on this. Attack the Midianites and show no compassion. You saw how bold their women are, openly sinning with an Israelite in sight of My sanctuary."

Moses Counts the People Again

26 After the plague had stopped, the Lord said to Moses and Eleazar, "Count the men from twenty years old and up who are fit for military service."

3-4. So Moses and Eleazar told the people what the Lord had said and counted all the men from twenty years old and up who had been born after the people had left Egypt.

5-11. There were more than 43,000

from the tribe of Reuben. This was the tribe that had been the most active in rebellion against Moses and Aaron when the earth had opened and destroyed Korah and his friends.

12-51. In round numbers there were 22,000 from Simeon; 40,000 from Gad; 76,000 from Judah; 64,000 from Issachar; 60,000 from Zebulun; 52,000 from Mannasseh; 32,000 from Ephraim; 45,000 from Benjamin; 64,000 from Dan; 53,000 from Asher; and 45,000 from Naphtali. There were more than 600,000 men fit for military service.

52-56. The Lord said to Moses, "The land of Canaan should be divided according to tribes. The larger tribes will need more land than the smaller ones. The location of the tribes should be decided by drawing lots."

57-61. Moses, Aaron, and Miriam had come from the tribe of Levi. Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, were also priests, but they had suddenly died because they had disobeyed the Lord while serving in the sanctuary.

62. Now there were 23,000 men from the tribe of Levi from one month old and up. These were not part of the military count because they were assigned to work at the sanctuary.

63-65. When Moses and Eleazar finished counting, they noticed that not one of the men who had explored the land of Canaan years before was still alive, except for Caleb and Joshua. In fact, all the adults who had left Egypt had died before they got to Canaan. The Lord let this happen because they did not believe that what He had promised He could do.

Inheritance

27 There was a family with five daughters—girls who were not on the list to receive property. So they went to Moses and

Eleazar and said, "Our father died on the way here, and we have no brothers to keep the family name. Why can't we have property in our name?"

5-7. Then Moses went and talked to the Lord about it. The Lord said, "These girls are right. You need to listen to them. They need to be given property so they don't have to depend on others."

8-11. "If a man dies and has no sons, his inheritance should go to the daughters. If he has no children at all, it goes to his brothers. If he has no brothers, it goes to his uncles. If he has no uncles, it goes to the closest male relative." And this is what was done.

Joshua Becomes the Leader

12-13. A few days later the Lord said to Moses, "Come up this mountain, and I'll let you see the land of Canaan. Then you will fall asleep and die, just as your brother Aaron did."

14. "I need to let you die this way because you dishonored My name when you struck the rock instead of talking to it to get water. And you took credit for doing it."

15-17. Moses said, "Lord, before I die, please let me know who is to take my place. It needs to be someone the people respect who can lead them into Canaan."

18-20. The Lord said, "Go and get Joshua. He is a humble man and listens to Me. He will take your place. You need to set him in front of the people as their new leader."

21. "Take him to Eleazar, the high priest, and lay your hands on him as a sign of transfer of leadership. I will guide him and answer his questions through the Urim and Thummim on the priest's breastpiece."

22-23. Moses did everything the Lord had told him to do. He asked Joshua

to come to the sanctuary and stand in front of the high priest. Then as the people watched, he laid his hands on him as a sign of transfer of leadership.

Instructions for Offerings

28 Before Moses died, the Lord said to him, "Tell the people that they should bring their offerings to Me at the right times and in the right spirit."

3-8. "Also tell the priests that they should offer a lamb, one in the morning and one in the evening, together with some flour, olive oil, and grape juice."

9-10. "On Sabbath the morning and evening offerings should be double, two lambs each time and twice the amount of flour, olive oil, and grape juice."

11-15. "The first day of each month is special. The priest should offer two young bulls, one ram, and seven lambs. With each bull he should offer six pounds of flour mixed with olive oil and two quarts of grape juice; with the ram, four pounds of such flour and a quart and a half of juice; and with each lamb, two pounds of flour with one quart of juice. He should also offer a goat as a sin offering."

16-25. "The Passover meal should be eaten at sundown on the fourteenth of the first month. On the fifteenth at sundown the seven-day Festival of Bread will begin. That day will be a holy day, and the offerings should be the same as those on the first day of each month. The last day of the festival should also be kept holy."

26-31. "Fifty days after the Passover and the Festival of Bread is the Harvest Festival, or Pentecost. That day too will be holy. The people should bring a sample of their harvests, and the offerings should be the same as those on the first of each month."

Festivals

29 The Lord continued: "On the first day of the seventh month the people should celebrate the Festival of Trumpets. That day too will be holy. The offerings will be the same as on the first day of each month, except only one young bull should be offered instead of two. **7-11.** "The tenth of the seventh month is also holy. It is the Day of Atonement, a time each year when the people should make things right with each other and with Me. The offerings should be the same as on the first day of the month.

12. "On the fifteenth the seven-day Festival of Tabernacles or Shelters begins. It should begin and end with a holy day.

13-16. "On the first day of this special week the priest should offer thirteen young bulls, two rams, and fourteen lambs, each with the regular amount of flour, olive oil, and grape juice. He should also offer a goat as a sin offering.

17-34. "Each day after that until the end of the festival, the offerings should be the same except one bull less for each day.

35-39. "The eighth day of the festival is also holy. The offerings should be the same, except bring only one young bull, one ram, and seven lambs. These offerings are in addition to the regular and special offerings the people bring."

40. Moses told the people everything the Lord had said.

Making Promises to God

30 Then Moses gave the people the other rules that the Lord had given him.

2. He said, "When a man promises the Lord that he will or will not do something, he must keep his word.

3-5. "When a young woman promises the Lord that she will or will not do something and her father doesn't object, she must keep her word. But if her father disapproves, then the Lord will release her from her promise.

6-13. "If a married woman promises the Lord that she will or will not do something and later her husband hears about it and doesn't object, her promise will stand. If he objects, the Lord will release her from her promise.

14-15. "When her husband hears about it and says nothing, her promise will also stand. If he hears about it and waits a long time and then objects, he is guilty of breaking it."

16. These are the rules the Lord gave Moses to give to the people having to do with making promises to the Lord.

The Midianites Defeated

31 Then Lord said to Moses, "The Midianites are about to attack you. Attack first and have no compassion on them. They were the ones who tricked your leaders into worshiping idols. After you defeat them, come up the mountain to see Me."

3-4. Moses said to the people, "Get ready to fight. The Midianites are coming. We will need 1,000 men from each tribe."

5-7. The men got ready. Eleazar's son Phinehas was chosen to lead them. When they were ready, he used the silver trumpets from the sanctuary to sound the charge, and the Israelites attacked.

8-11. They defeated the Midianites, and their five kings got killed, as well as Balaam, who was still with them. All the Midianite cities were set on fire, but the women and children were captured. The Israelites brought them home, including all their herds and flocks.

12-14. Then Moses, Eleazar, and the tribal leaders came out to meet the returning army. When Moses saw the women and children and other captives, as well as the herds and flocks, he became very angry.

15-18. He said, "Why have you brought the women home with you? These women have dedicated their bodies to worshiping idols. They will tempt you to do the same thing they did before. So kill all males and adult women for what they have done to you. But don't hurt the young ones, because they're innocent."

19-20. "Those of you who have touched the dead bodies of enemy troops need to stay outside the camp for one week. On the third and seventh days, purify yourselves and everything you brought with you."

21-24. Then Eleazar said, "Everything that does not burn, such as gold, silver, and iron, should be purified by holding it over the fire. Everything else should be washed. On the last day, bathe and wash your clothes; then you may come back into camp."

25-26. The Lord said to Moses, "You, Eleazar, and the tribal leaders should count the captives, the animals, and the items the troops brought back."

27-31. "Equally divide what the troops brought home between them and the people. Give a share of the army's part to the priests, and a share of the people's part to the Levites." And that's what Moses and the tribal leaders did.

32-47. There were thousands of captives, cattle, donkeys, and sheep that the troops brought home. Moses gave the priests and Levites their share, as the Lord had said.

48-50. Then the army officers said to Moses, "We have counted our men, and not one of them is missing. So we decided to give the Lord a part of the

jewelry we collected as a thank offering for protecting us."

51-54. The gold the officers collected from the troops and gave to Moses and Eleazar weighed more than 400 pounds. Then Moses and Eleazar took these thank offerings to the sanctuary as a reminder of what the Lord had done for His people.

Some Tribes Decide to Stay

32 The tribes of Reuben and Gad had huge flocks and herds. They went to Moses and the tribal leaders and said, "This place is quite suitable for us and our animals. We would like to stay here."

6-7. Moses said, "You mean you don't want to cross over the Jordan River and go into Canaan with the other tribes? If you stay here, some of the other tribes might stay also, and we won't be a united people anymore."

8-12. "That is what happened when we first came out of Egypt and listened to the men who explored the land of Canaan. The people were so divided over whether to move forward or not that the Lord was very displeased."

13-15. "We had to camp in the wilderness for many years before the Lord brought us to the borders of Canaan again. So let's not split up and do what we did before. The Lord will not like it."

16-19. The leaders of Reuben and Gad said, "No, we're ready to cross the river Jordan and go into Canaan with our brothers. But then we would like to come back here. Just let us get our families settled and our animals taken care of, and we're ready to go."

20-24. Moses said, "If that's what you have in mind, let's plan on it. Join your brothers as they go into Canaan to take the land, and once it's done, you're free to come back here. But if you don't help your brothers, you'll

be sinning against the Lord and will have to face the consequences. So take care of your families and get ready to go."

25-27. The leaders of Reuben and Gad said, "We promise to keep our word and obey the Lord. As soon as we take care of our families and our animals, we'll go help our brothers get their land too."

28-30. Then Moses said to Eleazar, Joshua, and the other tribal leaders, "The men from Reuben and Gad will go with you into Canaan to help secure the land. If they don't keep their promise, they can't have the land they now want."

31-32. The leaders of Reuben and Gad said, "We promise to fight alongside our brothers as the Lord wants us to. But the land on this side of Jordan will be our inheritance."

33-42. So Moses gave the people of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh the land they wanted and divided it among them. They settled their families in the towns, built fences for their flocks and herds, and were soon ready to go.

Moses Writes Israel's History

33 Then Moses wrote down the names of all the places they had camped from the time they left Egypt. He also wrote down everything that had happened in Egypt, at the Red Sea, the miracles of manna and water, the experience at Sinai, Aaron's death, and their arrival at the borders of Canaan.

Instructions From the Lord

50-52. Then the Lord said to Moses, "Tell the people that when they cross the river Jordan, they are to take possession of the land, for I have given it to them. There is plenty of other land

for the Canaanites. And when the people go in I want them to crush all the idols and carved images and destroy all the places of worship.

53-54. "This is the land I promised to give you. You should divide the land by tribes. And the size of the land should match the size of the tribe. But the location should be determined by drawing lots.

55-56. "If you let some of the Canaanites stay in the land, they will lead you into sin and turn you away from Me. They will never leave you alone, and if they have a chance, they will kill you. If you end up doing what they do, I will have to do to you the same thing I am doing to them."

The Boundaries of Canaan

34 The Lord continued and said to Moses, "Tell the children of Israel that the southern border of the land I am giving them will extend from Egypt to the Dead Sea.

6-12. "The western border will be the Mediterranean Sea, the northern border will be Lebanon, and the eastern border will be the Lake of Galilee."

13-15. Moses called the tribal leaders together and described the borders to them. Then he said, "Go in and divide the land among nine and a half tribes. The tribes of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh already have their land on this side of the Jordan River."

16-29. Then the Lord said to Moses, "The men to assign the land will be Eleazar, the high priest; Joshua; Caleb; and one leader from each tribe whom I will choose." These were the men chosen to divide the land.

Cities for the Levites

35 Again the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Tell the people that when the land is divided, they should give some of their cities and pastures to the Levites. Their tribe will receive no land of their own. The pasturelands around these cities are all that they will have for their animals.

6. "Six of these cities should be scattered among the tribes as cities of safety. If a man accidentally kills someone, he can quickly go to one of these cities and be protected from the dead man's angry relatives.

7-8. "These six cities are in addition to the forty-two cities the Levites will live in. The total number of cities in each tribe will depend on how big the tribal area is."

9-12. The Lord continued, "Tell the children of Israel that these six cities will belong to the Levites. They are for the protection of those who accidentally kill someone, and will assure a person of a fair trial.

13-15. "These six cities are to be scattered throughout the country, three on this side of Jordan and three on the other side. They are for the protection of not only Israelites but foreigners living in your country.

16-18. "If a man is angry and hits another man with something hard enough to kill him, he has committed murder and should pay for it by being put to death.

19. "The closest relative of the dead man has the right to find the murderer and kill him.

20-21. "If a man hates another man and pushes him off some high place or throws something at him to kill him, and the man dies, he too has committed murder. He should be put to death. If the dead man's relatives find the

murderer, they have a right to kill him. **22-24.** "If a man is careless and kills someone by accidentally knocking him off a high place or by throwing a stone and accidentally killing him, he is to be taken from the city of safety to a nearby place where the people can judge him according to the evidence presented by the judge.

25-28. "It is the people's responsibility to protect such a man if he's innocent. He should be taken back to the city of safety and live there until the high priest dies. If he leaves before then, the relatives have a right to find him and kill him. After the high priest dies, the man is free to go.

29. "This same law applies not only to the children of Israel but also to foreigners living in your country.

30. "Anyone who intentionally kills someone is to be arrested and stand trial. Only after two or three witnesses testify that they saw it happen should the man be executed.

31-32. "The murderer cannot buy his way free, nor can the man who accidentally killed someone buy his way out of the city of safety before his time.

33-34. "These laws should be strictly enforced so the country will not be full of bloodshed. Murderers are to be arrested and executed. Even those who kill people by carelessness should not be free to roam the country. I am the Lord, and I live among you. I want to have a country free of crime."

Family Inheritance

36 Some of the leaders went to Moses and said, "When the Lord asked you to give each tribe a portion of land, He also asked you to give some to the five daughters of the man who had no sons.

3-4. "Now suppose these young women marry men from other tribes.

Will the land they own go to their husbands' tribes?"

5-9. Moses replied, "That's a good question. These five young women must marry men from their own tribe. Tribal lands should not be chopped up, with little pieces belonging here and there. All of the land assigned to a

tribe is to always stay with that tribe."

10-12. So the five young women married men from their own tribe, and their property stayed with them.

13. These are the rules that the Lord gave to Moses when the children of Israel were near the city of Jericho on the borders of the land of Canaan.

Deuteronomy

INTRODUCTION: *Moses wrote this book when the Israelites were camped by the Jordan River across from the land of Canaan. He reviewed what God had done for them since they had left Egypt. He also told them not to forget that God blesses all those who keep His commandments. The Israelites listened to Moses and promised to always obey God. But Moses died before they went into the Promised Land, and Joshua took over.*

Moses' Farewell

1 The following is what Moses said to the children of Israel while they were still camped on the border of Canaan just before he died. It had been forty years since they left Egypt. They had defeated many enemies who had attacked them, and at Sinai God had given them the Ten Commandments.

6-8. Looking back, Moses said, "After we camped at Mount Sinai, the Lord told us to move on toward Canaan. He would give us the land from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River, as He promised Abraham.

9-13. "At Sinai I realized that the job of leadership was too much for me. The Lord had blessed us so much that we were as hard to count as the stars. How could I solve the problems of so many of you? I asked you to pick some men to help me.

14-16. "You agreed, so I put some men in charge of thousands, others in charge of hundreds or fifties or tens. I told these men to listen to your problems and help solve them. This included the foreigners living among us.

17-18. "I told them to always judge honestly and fairly, because the Lord would know whether they're doing things right or not.

19-25. "After we left Sinai and went through the vast wilderness, you suggested that we send some men ahead into Canaan to see what the land was like. We picked one man from each tribe to go and bring back a report. When they returned, they told us it was a good land. They even brought back samples of fruit.

26-28. "But when they also told us about the strong and powerful people living there, you got scared. You thought that the Lord had brought you into the wilderness to be killed.

29-33. "I begged you not to be scared, and reminded you of what the Lord had already done. But you refused to trust the Lord, even though He was in the pillar of cloud right in front of you.

34-40. "The Lord was not pleased. He said that only Caleb and Joshua would eventually go into Canaan. They were the two men who came back and urged us not to be afraid but to move ahead. The rest of us older ones would have to live in the wilderness until we died, including me.

41-42. "When you heard this, you said, 'We have sinned by giving in to our feelings. We will go and fight for the land the Lord has promised us.' But the Lord told you not to go. He

said He would not go with you, and you would be defeated.

43-46. "But you would not listen. You went out to fight, and the Canaanites defeated you and chased you for miles. Many were killed. You came back crying and prayed for help because you had been defeated. But the Lord refused to listen to you. So we had to break camp and go back into the wilderness, as He told us to.

The Camping Years

2"After going back into the wilderness, the Lord led us toward the Red Sea. Then we skirted the mountains and headed north toward the little country of Edom, where the descendants of Esau live. They did not let us take the short route through their country. So we had to go around it.

8-16. "Then we headed northeast toward the little country of Moab, which belonged to the descendants of Lot. The Lord kept leading us all those years from the time we left Egypt until now. By that time all those who had been afraid to go into Canaan the first time had died.

Attacked by a King

17-25. "After the Lord brought us through the little country of Moab, He led us across the river to the land of the Amorites. He told us that they would not permit us to pass through their country, but for us to move ahead, and He would help us.

26-31. "So I sent a message to King Sihon and asked him to let us pass through his country, but he refused. He was as stubborn as the king of Egypt had been. The Lord told us that He would give us this land in addition to the land of Canaan.

32-37. "Then the king came out and

attacked us. The Lord kept His promise and helped us defeat the Amorites and take their land. But the Lord told us not to take the land of the Ammonites, because they and the Moabites were descendants of Lot."

Attacked by Another King

3"From there we went on to the little country of Bashan. King Og attacked us, but the Lord helped us defeat him. So we took the land that belonged to both King Sihon and King Og. All their men were giants. King Og was a giant and had a bed more than thirteen feet long and six feet wide.

The Land Divided

12-22. "The tribes of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh liked the land, so the Lord gave it to them on the condition that they would help the other tribes get their land. They agreed. So I told Joshua to push ahead and not be afraid.

23-26. "I begged the Lord to let me go into the land of Canaan just to get a look at it. But He told me to stop asking. He could not let me go in, because at one place I became angry with you, struck the rock, and took credit for leading you out of Egypt. If He had let me lead you into Canaan, you would think I had done it.

27-29. "But the Lord did let me see the land from a distance. He told me to climb to the top of Mount Pisgah, and when I got there He worked a miracle so I could see all of Canaan. Then He told me to encourage Joshua to take charge and to push ahead into Canaan. So you camped there waiting for directions."

Importance of Obedience

4Moses said to the people, "Listen to me: obey the Lord and put Him first in your life. Then He

will go with you and give you the land He has promised. Do what He says and keep His commandments.

3-4. "You saw what happened when our men ate with the Midianites and ended up joining in their pagan worship. Those of you who were faithful to the Lord are still alive.

5-6. "I have told you everything the Lord has told me. So keep His commandments. If you do, other nations will see what obeying God has done for you. They will say, 'What a strong and wise people these Israelites are!' They will come to visit you, and you can tell them about our God.

7-8. "What other people is God so close to as He is to us? He hears our prayers and helps us in every way. What other people are governed by such righteous laws and teachings as we have?

9. "So don't forget what you have seen and heard. Don't let these things slip from your heart, or you'll lose your love for God. Tell these things to your children and their children so they will love the Lord with all their hearts.

10. "Don't forget what happened at Sinai and how you actually heard God's voice speaking to you. He told us what was right and wrong because He loves us. He wants us to love our children and pass these things on to them so they too will know what's right and wrong.

11-13. "Tell them how the whole mountain of Sinai was wrapped in a black cloud and the top of it was on fire. And tell them that the Lord spoke to us from the midst of the fire, giving us the Ten Commandments. He wrote them with His finger on two stone tablets, which we have in the sanctuary.

14. "On the mountain He told me to teach you the rest of His laws and ex-

plain how to apply them before you got to Canaan.

15-18. "When the Lord talked to you from the midst of the fire at Sinai, you did not see Him. He did this for your own good so you wouldn't make an idol of what you saw and then worship it. He doesn't want you to make idols of anything, people or animals.

19. "And don't admire the heavens, the sun, moon, and stars, so much that you worship them, as other people do.

20. "You are God's people. The Lord brought you out of Egypt and set you free.

21-22. "He was not happy with me when I gave you the impression that I was the one who brought water out of the rock. That's why He's not letting me go with you into Canaan. I'll have to be buried here. But He will take you into the land He promised to give you.

23. "Don't forget that the Lord is your leader. Listen to Him. Don't make idols and then believe that they can hear you, as some people believe. So stay away from idols.

24-25. "When you settle in Canaan and have children and grandchildren, don't forget that the Lord loves you, but He will discipline you if He has to.

26-28. "Heaven and earth is my witness—if you disobey the Lord, you will lose the land He is giving you. The Lord will let your enemies come and take you captive, and you'll be scattered everywhere. And you'll end up worshipping idols of wood and stone.

29-31. "But if you turn back to the Lord and search for Him with all your heart, you will find Him. Then He'll bring you back into the land, and you will be glad to obey Him. God loves you and is very merciful. He will never leave you or forget the covenant He made with Abraham.

32-33. "Has anything like this ever

happened before? Look to the past, and you will not find anything like it. When have people heard God's own voice speaking to them out of a blazing fire and lived to talk about it?

34-35. "Have any gods gone into a country and taken out a people for themselves by miracles such as we have seen? The Lord has done all this for you because He loves you. It proves that He alone is God.

36-38. "He guided you by the pillar of cloud by day and protected you by a pillar of fire by night. He brought you out of Egypt and has driven out your enemies, who were bigger and more powerful than you.

39-40. "Remember this and take it to heart. Don't forget that the Lord is God of heaven and earth. Keep His commandments, and He will bless you in the land where you're going."

41-43. Moses picked three cities east of Jordan to be cities of safety. These are cities to which people who accidentally kill someone can come and be safe from revenge of the dead person's relatives. He picked one city for each of the three tribes.

44-49. These are some of the rules and laws that God gave to Moses and that Moses gave to the people. Moses told them these things before they crossed the Jordan to go into Canaan. The area east of Jordan had once belonged to the Amorites. They had attacked but were defeated.

The Ten Commandments Repeated

5 Again Moses called the people together and said, "I want you to listen to the laws that the Lord has given us and to obey them, especially the Ten Commandments.

3-5. "He made a written covenant with you, one that He did not make

with our ancestors. He spoke to you clearly, as if you were talking face to face. I stood between you and the Lord because you were afraid, especially of the fire surrounding Him.

6. "When the Lord spoke, He said, 'I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt and set you free. I want you to be a good people. I want you to reflect Me.

7. "'Don't love anything more than Me.

8-10. "'Don't make images of things in heaven or on earth and worship them. Your children will see you do this, and they and their children will do it too. So be good and worship Me, and I will bless you and thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

11. "'Don't use My name carelessly or in cursing. To do so is a sin.

12-15. "'Keep the Sabbath. Do all your work in six days, but the seventh day is for you to rest and worship Me. On that day do no regular work, neither you, your family, those who work for you, nor the foreigners who live among you. Remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt, and I am the one who set you free. That's another reason I want you to keep the Sabbath.

16. "'Honor your parents. Respect them, and I will bless you.

17. "'Don't kill.

18. "'Don't be unfaithful in marriage.

19. "'Don't steal.

20. "'Don't lie.

21. "'Don't covet what someone else has.'

22. "These are the commandments the Lord gave us as He spoke to us from a blazing fire. Then He wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to us.

23-27. "After you heard God speak these commandments, your leaders came to me and said, 'We heard God speak from the blazing fire, and some-

how we're still alive. But how can we be sure that we'll live through the next time He speaks? We're afraid. So you talk to Him and tell us what He says.'

28-29. "So the next time that I went up the mountain, God said, 'I heard what the leaders asked. They have learned to respect Me. If they listen to Me and obey, I will bless them and their children forever.'

30-31. "'Go back down and tell them not to be afraid, because from now on I will speak directly to you instead. Then come back up, and I will tell you how they should apply the commandments in the land of Canaan.'

32-33. "This is what the Lord said to me. So listen to what I have to tell you. I want you to obey the Lord and live a long and happy life. And I want things to go well with you, and so does the Lord, because He loves you."

Encouragements

6 Moses continued: "Show that you respect God by obeying Him. Then He can bless you, and you will live a long and happy life. Listen to me and do what He says, and He will help you become a strong and powerful nation.

4-6. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. Don't forget His commandments, but keep them as long as you live.

7-9. "Teach your children to love the Lord. Talk about Him at home and when you travel. Let His words guide your work and your thoughts. Post them on the walls and doors of your houses so you won't forget.

Warnings

10-11. "The Lord will bring you into the land He promised to give you. Your houses will be full of good

things, and your groves will be full of fruit trees.

12-13. "When you have all this and are satisfied, don't forget that the Lord brought you out of Egypt and set you free. Never lose your respect for the Lord. Obey Him, for He is your God.

14-15. "Don't worship other gods. The Lord wants you to belong only to Him. He will discipline you if He has to. He will let your enemies come into the land and defeat you, until you come back to Him.

16-17. "Don't test the Lord to see what you can get away with. Pay attention to what He has told you, and obey Him, because He really does love you.

18-19. "If you do what is right, all will go well with you as a people. You will possess the land and defeat all your enemies, just as the Lord promised your ancestors.

20-23. "When your children say, 'Why did the Lord give us all these laws?' tell them that once you were slaves in Egypt, and the Lord set you free. Tell them about the miracles you saw, what happened to the king of Egypt, and how the Lord brought you into the land He said He would.

24-25. "Tell them about Sinai, where the Lord spoke to you and told you to keep His commandments because He loves you. Tell them to look around and see how He has blessed His people. Tell them that the Lord wants us to be a good people. That's why He has given us all these laws."

A Chosen People

7 Moses said, "The Lord will give you the land He has promised and will help you defeat people bigger and stronger than you.

2-5. "When they attack you, don't hesitate to fight back. Don't make any treaties with them. Don't let your

sons marry their daughters. If you do, they'll turn your sons away from the Lord to worship their gods. Destroy their altars and burn their idols.

6. "You're a special people, and God wants you to be a good people. He has picked you out from people around the world to tell others about His greatness and love.

7-9. "The Lord didn't choose you because there were so many of you. He chose you because of the promise He gave Abraham. That's why He brought you out of Egypt and set you free. He is our God because of what He has done for us. He keeps His promises and blesses those who love Him and keep His commandments.

10-11. "He will discipline those who say they love Him but don't change their ways. He will confront those who don't take Him seriously. So listen to Him. He loves you and wants you to be happy.

12-15. "If you keep His commandments, He will keep His promise. He will bless you, and your crops, flocks, and herds. There will be no other nation in the world like you. You will be healthy and strong.

16. "He will help you defeat your enemies. Don't make a peace treaty with them and then allow them to stay in the land, or they will be a trap to you and turn you away from the Lord.

17-21. "Don't keep telling yourselves that you can't defeat these people. With God on your side, you can. Think back to what the Lord did for you in Egypt. You saw His amazing power and strength. If He has to, He'll send hornets to drive out your enemies, so don't be afraid. The Lord is awesome. He will go with you.

22-24. "He will drive out your enemies little by little as you need more room. If He did it all at once, there would be

vacant areas, and animals would come and take over. So He will do it slowly but thoroughly. He will help you defeat kings and destroy them.

25-26. "Be sure to crush their idols and burn them. Don't take any silver or gold belonging to these idols, or you will always be reminded of them and will forget the Lord. Don't take any idols home as souvenirs, no matter how small they are. They will be a curse to you. Destroy them."

Don't Forget

8 Moses continued: "Keep all of God's commandments. Remember what the Lord has done for you and how He has taken care of you. He even tested you at times so that you could know what was in your own hearts.

3-4. "He let you get hungry, then fed you with manna to teach you that spiritual food is more important than everyday food. And He took care of you physically so that your feet didn't swell from all that walking.

5-6. "He disciplined you because He loves you and wants you to be good and do what is right. So keep His commandments, walk in His ways, and give Him the respect He deserves.

7-10. "The Lord is taking you into a good land with rivers and lakes, a land full of crops and fruit, enough to satisfy all your needs. It's also a land full of iron and copper for your tools. So when you have settled in the land and are happy, praise the Lord for what He has done for you.

11-13. "Don't forget. Show that you love God by obeying Him. Once you have houses and large flocks and herds and don't lack for money, it will be very easy to forget about the Lord.

14-16. "You will start thinking more and more about yourself and slowly

slip away from God. Then you won't appreciate what He has done for you. You'll forget that He was the one who brought you out of Egypt and set you free, protected you, and fed you with bread from heaven.

17-18. "You will be tempted to think that everything you have, you got yourself. Don't forget that it was the Lord who gave you the ability to get wealth.

19-20. "If you do forget that it was the Lord who did all this for you, you will begin worshiping other gods. Then the Lord will discipline you to bring you back to Him. If that doesn't work, He will have to turn against you as His people."

Moses Reviews Their History

9 Moses said, "Listen to me! You are about to cross over the Jordan River and go into the Promised Land. The people there are bigger and stronger than you. Their cities are surrounded by huge walls. And some of their soldiers are giants. But God will fight for you, and you will see how mighty He is.

4-6. "Don't say, 'The Lord helped us because we're a good people.' That's not true. It's because the people there have become so wicked that the Lord is pushing them out of the land. Don't think that it's because you're so good. You're actually a very strong-willed and stubborn people.

7-10. "Just think back. At Sinai you worshiped a golden calf while I was on the mountain and the Lord was writing out the Ten Commandments on stone tablets for you. This was right after He had spoken personally to you, and you had agreed to obey Him.

11-14. "I was on the mountain with Him for forty days. He handed me the stone tablets and said, 'You had bet-

ter go back down, because the people have gone wild with excitement over a golden calf they have made. They are going through some of the same shameful rituals that the pagans do.'

15-17. "So I went down the mountain, and when I saw what you were doing, I couldn't believe it. I was so angry that I threw down the stone tablets so hard that they broke. You had broken the law of God that just a few days ago you had promised to keep.

18-21. "Then I went back and fasted and prayed, asking the Lord to forgive you. I was afraid that you had gone too far. The Lord was not pleased with Aaron for letting you do this. So I prayed for him, too. Before this I melted down the golden calf, ground it into powder, threw it into the stream, and made you drink from it.

22-24. "Later you rebelled again when the Lord told you to go ahead and take the Promised Land. You didn't trust Him, so you refused to go. You have been a strong-willed and stubborn people ever since I've known you.

25-27. "When I was on the mountain, I prayed for you. I said to the Lord, 'Please be kind to Your people, even though they don't deserve it, and don't destroy them. You brought them out of Egypt with great power because You love them. Please remember the promise You made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because they loved and trusted You. Don't look at how bad the people have been.

28-29. "If You destroy them, the Egyptians will say that You didn't really love them but hated them, and that's why You destroyed them. But You brought them out of Egypt with such a show of power that no one doubts that these people are Yours."

Israel's History Continued

10 Moses continued: "When I finished praying, the Lord told me to go back down, chisel out two tablets of stone, and come back up. And that's what I did.

4-5. "Then the Lord wrote on the new stone tablets the same Ten Commandments that He had spoken to you from the mountain. He gave them back to me, and after we built the sanctuary, I put them into the ark, as He had told me to.

6-9. "After we left Sinai, Aaron died, and his son Eleazar took over. Before that, the Lord had set aside the Levites to carry the ark and to help the priests. That's why the Levites will not receive their own tribal land. Their inheritance is to serve the Lord.

10-11. "When I was on the mountain the second time for forty days talking to the Lord, I asked Him to forgive you for worshipping the golden calf. He did forgive you, because He loves you. Then He told me to go back down the mountain and lead you toward the Promised Land.

What Is Really Important

12-13. "So listen to me. What is the Lord really interested in? He wants you to love Him with all your heart. He wants you to keep His commandments so that you can be a good people.

14-16. "Everything in heaven and earth belongs to Him. He is a powerful God with a heart full of love. He loved your ancestors and chose you to be His special people. So circumcise your hearts and minds by not being so strong-willed and stubborn. Learn to be grateful and kind.

17. "The Lord is above all the gods that people make for themselves. Our God is a real God. He is a mighty king, and He is fair and just with everyone.

18-19. "He is especially interested in orphans, widows, and foreigners who come to live with us. He wants you to help them for Him and give them what they need. Remember that once you were foreigners in Egypt, so you know what it's like.

20-21. "Love the Lord with all your heart and keep the promises you made to Him, just as He keeps His promises to you. For you to be loved as you are should make you a happy people. He showed His love to you by bringing you out of Egyptian bondage and setting you free.

22. "Years ago your ancestors went to live in Egypt to escape the famine. There were only seventy of them. But look at you now. There are so many of you that you're as hard to count as the stars in the sky."

Obedience Rewarded

11 Moses continued: "So love the Lord and listen to Him. Don't forget the experiences you have had with the Lord and what you have learned about Him. You saw His power and what He did to the king of Egypt and his army at the Red Sea.

5-7. "You saw what the Lord did to Korah and his friends when they rebelled. You saw the earth open and watched as they fell in.

8-12. "So listen to me. Do what the Lord says, and you'll live a long and happy life in the land where you're going. You won't have to carry water for long distances, as you did in Egypt. This land has lots of lakes and streams to give you the water you need. The Lord knows what He's doing.

13-15. "Be grateful to the Lord and love Him with all your heart. Then He will continue to bless you, to water your fields, and to give you good crops and vineyards. There will be

lots of grass for your cattle and sheep. And you and your family will have plenty to eat.

16-17. "So when you're settled and have everything you need, don't be tempted to worship the idols that other people do. If you do, the Lord will have to discipline you to protect you. He will no longer take care of the land. Your crops won't grow, and you and your children will get sick and die.

18. "So make up your mind who will be first in your life. Take these things to heart. If you have to, write God's words on the backs of your hands or on your foreheads so you don't forget what I've told you.

19-20. "Teach God's words to your children every chance you get, when they get up, when they go to bed, and during the day. Write them down and nail them to the doors of your house so you don't forget them.

21-23. "If you stay close to the Lord and obey Him, you and your children will live a long and happy life. If you love Him and keep His commandments, He will go ahead of you and help you take the land He promised, even though the people there are bigger and stronger than you.

24-25. "The whole land will be yours from the great Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea. The Lord will be with you. Other countries will respect you because they will know that they can't stand against you.

26-28. "So I'm giving you a choice. If you love the Lord, He will bless you. If you disobey and do your own thing, He can't bless you.

29-30. "One thing I want you to do when you enter Canaan is to recite from the mountains the blessings that will be yours if you obey and the bad things that will happen to you if you don't. These mountains

are right across the border as soon as you go in.

31-32. "Soon you'll be going into the land the Lord promised to give you. After you get settled in Canaan, don't forget to do what I have told you.

The Place of Worship

12 "Listen," Moses continued, "God means what He says. When you get into the land, He wants you to destroy all the places of idol worship, no matter where you find them, in the cities or in the mountains.

3-4. "Destroy the idols and altars and burn the wooden statues of gods and goddesses. Get rid of these filthy places of worship. Never worship such idols or bring that kind of worship into God's presence.

5-9. "The Lord will tell you where and how to worship Him. When He picks the place, that's where you should bring your sacrifices and offerings. That's where you should praise the Lord and eat the meal of thanksgiving. Don't think you can do it anywhere you want just because some of you are not settled yet.

10-12. "Once you've settled in the land, God will choose a more permanent place where He wants you to worship and where to bring your sacrifices and tithes and offerings. That's where you and your family should come to worship and enjoy God's presence together.

13-14. "Don't sacrifice your animals just anywhere you choose. Take them to the place the Lord tells you to.

15-16. "You may kill an animal, such as a sheep or a deer, to feed your family. Cook the meat well. And don't eat the blood; pour it out on the ground.

17-19. "Don't take a tenth of your harvest or sacrifice an animal to the

Lord wherever you please. Bring your tithes and offerings to the place God will choose. That's where your families should have your festival meals. Invite the Levites and your servants to join you. Be thankful and happy together.

20-25. "Now, what will you do when you get settled and live too far away from the place the Lord picked out? Then you can have these festival meals in your hometown, as long as you follow the same rules of what to eat and not to eat.

26-28. "Bring all your tithes and offerings and animal sacrifices to the place of worship that the Lord will show you. If you follow these rules, God will bless you and your families.

29-31. "When you settle in the land the Lord is about to give you, don't study the kind of gods the people worship, or you'll end up doing the same things. These people sacrificed their own babies to these idols. That's from the devil. Keep your mind focused on the Lord.

32. "Do everything I've told you to do. Don't make new rules or change the ones I've given you.

False Prophets

13 "Let me warn you about false prophets. If someone tells you that the Lord spoke to him in a vision or dream and then performs a miracle to prove it, be careful. **2-3.** "If he predicts something and it happens, but then he tells you to include other gods in your worship, don't listen to him. God will let this happen to test you, to see if you love Him as you say you do and if you're still willing to obey Him.

4. "Be loyal to God and do what He says. He is the only one to hold on to. Listen to Him. Obey Him. Serve

Him. Don't listen to anyone who tells you differently.

5. "If a false prophet tries to turn you away from the Lord, he should be stopped. If he keeps on causing trouble, he should be arrested and put to death.

6-8. "Even if your own brother or sister, or your son, daughter, or wife urges you to include other gods in your worship, don't listen to them.

9-11. "Anyone who does the same thing, who won't stop but keeps on urging people to include other gods, should be arrested and put to death. Their influence is like a plague. This will keep this kind of wickedness from spreading.

12-16. "If you hear that this sort of thing has taken over a whole town or city, check it out. Don't just go by what you hear. If it's true, then take the sword and go in and stop it. If the people fight back, destroy the place. Be sure to destroy all the images, and then set the town on fire.

17-18. "Don't take any souvenirs for yourself. The important thing is to put the Lord first. Obey Him and keep His commandments, and He will bless you and make you a great people."

Other Instructions

14 Moses said, "Remember that you belong to the Lord. When someone dies, don't cut your bodies, shave your heads, or do strange things, as others do. You are God's people and are a treasure to Him. **3-8.** "Now, about your diet. You may eat the meat of cattle, sheep, goats, deer, and so on, as long as the animal has a divided hoof and also chews its food a second time, as a cow does. If it doesn't, such as a pig or a rabbit, don't eat it.

9-10. "You may eat any kind of fish as

long as it has fins and scales. If it doesn't, don't eat it.

11-20. "You may eat such meat from the bird family as chickens and turkeys, but not eagles, vultures, owls, pelicans, storks, and so on. Don't eat flying insects.

21. "Don't eat an animal that died for no obvious reason. It might have had a disease. If others want to eat it, that's up to them. But you belong to the Lord. Don't cook the meat of a young animal in its mother's milk.

22-24. "Don't forget to tithe your herds, flocks, and crops. The tithe belongs to the Lord. Also, set aside a tenth of your animals and crops for yourself so that when you come to the religious festivals you can enjoy yourself and be grateful for what the Lord has done for you.

25-27. "If you live too far away to do this, then sell these animals and this part of your crops and use the money to bring your whole family to these festivals. Then you can buy what you need and fellowship with God's people from other parts of the country.

28-29. "Every third year, set aside a third tithe to keep in reserve to feed the poor and those who have no land, including the Levites. This way the widows and orphans in your villages and cities can celebrate the religious festivals with you. The Lord won't forget your kindness, and He will bless you for it.

Debts

15 "Every seventh year you should cancel the debts of those who owe you anything. Don't make anyone pay you what he still owes you, unless he's from another country.

5-6. "Obey the Lord, and all will go well with you. He will bless you indi-

vidually and as a nation. You will not have to borrow from other nations, but they will borrow from you.

7-9. "If a brother comes to you for help, lend him what he needs no matter what tribe he's from. Don't tell him it's too close to the year when debts are canceled. That's selfish. When he prays and tells the Lord his problems, the Lord will hold you responsible for not helping him when you could have.

10-11. "Lend your brother what he needs, and do it willingly. The Lord will bless you for it. Remember that unexpected things can happen to anyone to make them poor.

12-15. "If a brother is so poor that he offers to sell himself to you as a slave so that he can pay his debts, buy him. And when the seventh year comes, set him free. But don't send him away empty-handed. Once you were slaves in Egypt, and the Lord was generous to you.

16-18. "If the man tells you that he likes working for you and wants to stay, put a little hole in his earlobe as a sign that he belongs to you as long as he lives. But if a servant wants to go, let him. Be kind to him. It's the same for men or women.

19. "Set aside every firstborn male from your flocks and herds for the Lord. Don't use them to do your farm work, and don't shear those sheep. These animals belong to Him.

20-21. "Bring these animals as peace and thank offerings to the place the Lord will choose. Be sure they're healthy and not deformed. Give some of the meat to the priest, and the rest is for your family.

22-23. "If the place is too far for you, you may use these animals for a sacred meal at home. Invite others to eat with you whether they've been approved

for the sacred meal by the priest or not. You may eat this meat as you would the meat of a gazelle or a deer. Only be sure there's no blood left in it."

Three Pilgrim Festivals

16 Moses continued: "Keep the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month of your religious year. This will help you remember how the Lord brought you out of Egypt and set you free. Bring an animal as a sacrifice to the place the Lord will choose.

3-4. "And keep the Festival of Bread with the Passover; they go together. During this time your bread should be made without yeast, and the Passover meat should be eaten that night. Whatever is left should be destroyed.

5-7. "Don't keep the Passover wherever you want, but come to the place the Lord will choose. Sacrifice a lamb or goat at sunset, because that's when you left Egypt. Roast the meat and eat it right there. The next day you may go back home.

8. "For the six days that follow, you should eat bread made without yeast. The seventh day is like a sabbath. No work should be done on that day.

9-10. "Seven weeks later you should keep the Festival of Harvest, also called Pentecost. It's a time for you to celebrate your first harvest. Come before the Lord to thank Him for what He has done for you. And bring Him an offering according to how He has blessed you.

11-12. "You should celebrate this day with your families and your servants. Be sure to invite the Levites, widows, orphans, and aliens to join you. Once you were slaves in the land of Egypt, but now you are free. So love the Lord and keep His commandments.

13-14. "The third most important festi-

val is the Festival of Tabernacles, also called the Harvest Festival. This is to celebrate the last of your harvests for the year. Your whole family should celebrate it, and again, be sure to invite the Levites, widows, orphans, and aliens to join you.

15. "This festival lasts a whole week, and you should keep it in the place the Lord chooses. Come and be happy in the Lord. Thank Him for what He has done for you, and He will continue to bless you.

16-17. "So three times a year you and all in your family who can should keep these pilgrim festivals. And don't come before the Lord empty-handed. Bring a gift according to how He has blessed you.

Judges Must Be Fair

18-20. "Once you settle in the land, you need to appoint judges to serve in your cities and towns. You are not to pressure these judges or bribe them to favor you. If you do, they will not be fair to the other people. Judges must be honorable and trustworthy. Only then can the Lord bless you.

21-22. "Never place an idol or set up a pagan stone pillar next to the altar of sacrifice in the sanctuary courtyard. This would be a terrible insult to the Lord."

Laws and Regulations

17 Moses continued: "Don't bring an animal that is defective as a sacrifice to the Lord. That's an insult.

2-4. "If you hear that someone has broken the covenant we have made with God and is worshiping idols in addition to the Lord, even if it's only the sun, moon, and stars, you need to check it out. If it's true, it's an insult to God.

5-7. "Whoever does this should be

arrested, and after witnesses have confirmed it, he should be put to death. That's the only way you can stop this sort of thing. If you find out that it was just a rumor, the person who falsely testified against the man should be arrested and be put to death instead.

8-9. "If there comes to a judge a case that's too hard for him and he can't decide who did what or who is telling the truth, take the case to the Lord at the place He chooses. The priest on duty and an appointed judge will sit as a high court to hear the case.

10-11. "Whatever the higher court decides will be final. Don't go against it, or you'll bring disorder and confusion into the whole country. Accept the decision and don't try to get around it.

12-13. "Anyone who goes against the higher court should be arrested and put to death. This is the only way to have an orderly society, because people will hear about it and will be careful not to break the law.

14-15. "When you have settled in the land and decide to have a king as other nations do, check with the Lord. If He agrees, then ask Him to help you pick one. It should be a man from your own people, not a foreigner.

16. "You should make some rules for the king so he does things right. He is not to have his own private army. He is not to send people to Egypt to buy battle horses. Not one Hebrew should ever go back to Egypt.

17. "He is not to marry many women. Nor is he to get rich by making people pay more taxes than is needed to support the country.

18-20. "When he becomes king, he should write out for himself all the laws and rules that God has given us. He should study these laws and stay close to the Lord. He should not think

that he's better than anyone else or that he's above the law. Only then can the Lord bless him."

Priests and Levites

18 Moses said, "The Lord told us that the priests and Levites are not to have land of their own, but to live off the offerings you bring.

3-5. "In addition to their share of the meat from the offerings, they are to be given the first sample of your harvests of grain, grapes, and olive oil, and wool from your sheep. The Lord wants them to give their time to the sanctuary and not try to make a living some other way.

6-8. "No matter where a priest or Levite lives, he has a right to work at the sanctuary, just as do those who live nearby. He should help in the work and receive his share of the offerings, even though he has money from selling part of his inheritance.

Warnings

9-11. "When you cross the Jordan River and settle in the land, don't do what the people there are doing. They practice witchcraft, magic, and sorcery; make their children walk on hot coals; and sacrifice babies to idols. They claim they can talk to the dead, but they're actually talking to demons.

12-14. "The Lord hates this because of what it does to people. That's why He is driving the inhabitants out of the land and giving it to you. So don't do the same things. Love the Lord and hold on to Him. You can see what witchcraft has done to these people, so don't do what they have done.

A New Prophet

15. "The time will come when God will give you a Prophet greater than I am.

He will grow up among you and be one of you. You need to listen to Him.

16-17. "This is the kind of Person you asked for back at Sinai. You asked God to give you a go-between, who can speak to you for God. You were afraid that if God spoke to you directly, you would die.

18-19. "So God promised that He would send you a special Prophet. God will tell Him what to say, and He will make it plain to you. But if you don't listen to Him, God will hold you responsible.

20. "If anyone tries to take the place of this Prophet and tells you that he is speaking for God, don't listen to him. And if he claims to speak for some local god or asks you to worship some idol, he should be arrested and put to death.

21-22. "How can you tell a true prophet from a false one? If he predicts something, and it doesn't happen, then you know it was not from the Lord. It was his own idea. Don't be afraid of him, and don't give him the respect a true prophet deserves."

Criminal Cases

19 Moses continued: "After the Lord brings you into the land, pick out three cities across the country and build good roads to them so that a man being chased can get there fast.

4-5. "These will be cities of safety for a man who accidentally kills someone, and the dead man's relatives are chasing him. For instance, if a man is chopping down a tree, and the ax head flies off the handle and hits another man and kills him, it was an accident.

6. "These cities will be placed where he can run to one easily and be protected by the law until the whole matter is fully investigated. Sometimes a

dead man's relatives want to take revenge and kill the one who killed him.

7-10. "The tribes who live this side of the Jordan River should also have three such cities. As your territory expands you'll need three more. These are needed so that people won't take the law into their own hands.

11-13. "If a man hates someone so much that he purposely kills him and then runs to one of these cities, his case should also be investigated. If it proves to be true, he should be arrested and given the death penalty. This is the only way to keep law and order and to keep people from killing those they don't like.

14. "Don't change property lines. Once you give each family its property, the boundaries should always stay the same.

15-17. "One witness is not enough to convict a man of a crime. There should be at least two or three witnesses. If it looks as though one of them is lying, the man and the witnesses should be taken before the judges, who will check things out.

18-19. "If they find that one of the witnesses lied, they should give him the same sentence that would have gone to the man he falsely accused.

20-21. "When people hear what happens to witnesses who lie, that will stop others from lying. The judge should not go easy on anyone who lies, no matter who he is. It's the law of equality.

Rules of War

20 "When your enemies attack you, and their army is greater than yours, don't be afraid. God will help you as He did in Egypt.

2-4. "Before you go into battle, a priest should come and pray for the

troops and say to them, 'Men of Israel, don't lose courage, because the Lord your God will go with you and give you the victory.'

5-9. "The officers should not take to war men who have built a new house, planted a new vineyard, are engaged to be married, or are afraid.

10-12. "When you surround a city, give the people a chance to surrender. If they do, treat them well. If they refuse, stop everything going in and out of the city.

13-14. "When you finally take the city, don't let any of their soldiers live, or they will regroup and attack you again. Don't harm any of the women and children or flocks and herds. The city now belongs to you.

15-16. "These rules are for distant cities, not the ones in the land where you are going. The cities in Canaan should be completely destroyed. All the idols and anything religious should also be destroyed.

17-18. "Treat all people alike. Don't favor one religious group above another, or they will take advantage of your kindness and lead you into idolatry.

19-20. "If you surround such a city and the siege is taking a long time, don't cut down the fruit trees for building ramps to attack the city. Those trees belong to you. Use some other kind of trees, but don't use fruit trees."

Rules for Unsolved Murders

21 Moses continued: "Suppose you find a man's body lying in a field, and you don't know who killed him. Measure the distance from his body to each of the nearest cities.

3-5. "The officials of the closest city should take a calf to a nearby stream and sacrifice it. A priest should go

with them to pray for them and to help settle the case.

6-9. "Then the officials should wash their hands and say, 'Lord, we promise that our city is innocent. We did not kill this man and don't know who did. Accept this offering and please don't hold us responsible.' This is the only way to handle unsolved cases and deter crime.

Prisoners of War

10-11. "When you're attacked, the Lord will help you defeat your enemies. If you see a beautiful woman among the captives and would like to marry her, you need to ask her.

12-13. "If she says, 'Yes,' bring her back home with you. Then have her cut off her hair, trim her long fingernails, and put on Israelite clothes. She should be given one month to mourn the death of her father and mother; then you may marry her.

14. "If after you're married, neither one of you is happy, she is free to go wherever she wants. If she decides to stay, she is to be treated as one of My people and not as a foreigner. She should not be made a slave.

Inheritance

15-17. "A man should not have two wives. But if he does, the son who is born first is to receive a double portion of what the father owns. It should not go to the other boy just because the father likes that boy's mother best.

Judges

18-19. "If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who refuses to obey even after he is disciplined, the parents should take him to the judge.

20-21. "They should hold nothing back, but tell the judge everything, including how he keeps getting drunk

and robbing people. The judge should check into this, and if it's true, he should hand down the death sentence. That's the only way to stop this kind of thing.

22-23. "If a man commits a crime and is sentenced to death by hanging, take down his body that day and bury it."

Rules for Every Day

22 Moses also said, "If you see someone's sheep running loose, get it and take it back to the owner. If you can't find him, or if he lives too far away, take care of the sheep for him until he comes looking for it.

3. "Do the same for any animal you find running loose. And if you find anything else that belongs to your brother, hold it for him until he comes after it.

4. "If you see a donkey lying in the street and the owner is trying to get it back on its feet, go and help him.

5. "Women should not dress as if they were men, nor should men dress as if they were women. This does not please God, because He didn't make us the same.

6-7. "If you see a mother bird sitting on a nest, don't scare her or try to catch her. You can take the baby birds, but don't touch the mother. If you're kind to animals, the Lord will remember and bless you for it.

8. "When you build a house with a flat roof, put a railing around it so people won't fall off and get killed. If that happens, you'll be held responsible.

9. "Don't do as the people living in Canaan and plant crops between the rows of your vineyards. If you do, the products are not to be used but be given to the sanctuary.

10. "When you plow, don't hitch an ox and a donkey together, a strong animal with a weak one. That's not fair.

11-12. "Don't wear clothes made of different materials, believing it gives you special power. Make your clothes of one material, and sew little tassels on the corners of your coat to show that you belong to the Lord.

Purity

13-15. "If a man gets married and then lies about his wife's purity in order to get rid of her, her parents should take the case to the city leaders and the judge.

16-19. "They should listen to the evidence, and if the young woman's husband lied, they should order him publicly whipped and fine him 100 silver coins. This money should be given to her parents. And he cannot divorce her ever.

20-21. "If the husband's charges are true, the young woman has disgraced her family and all the women in Israel by lying to the judge about her purity. She should be arrested and given the death sentence. This is the only way to stop this kind of wickedness.

22-27. "If a man and a woman who's engaged to someone else sleep together, and she doesn't resist, they are both guilty and should be arrested and given the death penalty for covering up their sin. But if she resisted and he forced her, he should be arrested and sentenced to death for doing that to her. She shall go free.

28-29. "If a man forces a woman who is not engaged to sleep with him, he must marry her. She is to be his wife as long as he lives. He cannot divorce her.

30. "Also a man should not marry his young stepmother after his father dies. That's a disgrace and should not be allowed."

Church Rules

23 Moses said, "No one who has cut his body or put marks on it to show his devotion to some other god may come into the sanctuary courtyard.

2. "No one who comes from a pagan marriage and continues to worship as his parents do may come into the sanctuary courtyard.

3-6. "No one who is against us may come into the sanctuary courtyard, unless they've changed. Some of these people refused to give you a drink of water and hired Balaam to curse us. But God made him bless us. Don't make an agreement with these people.

7-8. "Don't turn away from the descendants of Jacob's brother Esau, or from an Egyptian, because the king of Egypt let Jacob come and live there. If they become one of you, they can then come into the sanctuary courtyard, as you do.

9. "During war, stay away from anything that would make you unfit to worship the Lord.

10-11. "If during the night a soldier has a bodily discharge, first thing in the morning he should wash himself and stay outside the camp until sunset.

12-14. "Each one of your troops should carry a little spade with him so that when he has to get rid of bodily wastes, he can dig a little hole and cover it up. Your army camps should stay clean, because the Lord's presence is there with you.

Other Rules

15-16. "If a slave runs away and comes to you for protection, you are not to return him. Let him stay with you as one of the family.

17-18. "No woman should get a job at a pagan temple, no matter what they pay. The same holds true for a man.

Don't accept an offering from anyone who makes money by living in sin. That's wrong.

19-20. "Don't charge interest on money you lend to a fellow Israelite. But you may charge interest to others. If you follow these rules, the Lord will bless you.

21. "If you take an oath and promise to give the Lord something, don't keep putting it off. He expects you to do it as soon as you can. If you don't keep your promise, you'll be guilty of stealing from Him.

22-23. "Don't take an oath to promise to do something for the Lord; just do it. If something happens so you can't, He'll understand. But if you take an oath, you must keep it no matter what, because it was your decision.

24-25. "If you're hungry and you walk past your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat some of the grapes, but don't take any home. The same rule applies if you pass a grain field."

Divorce

24 Moses continued: "If a man gets married and later his wife dishonors him by misbehaving in public, he can divorce her as long as he fills out the proper papers.

2-4. "Suppose he divorces her and she marries someone else, then does the same thing to her second husband, and he divorces her. Her first husband cannot take her back. This is wrong and offensive to the Lord.

Other Laws

5. "When a man gets married, he should not be called into the army for one year.

6. "When you lend someone money, don't take one of his millstones as a pledge, because without both of them, he can't grind his wheat.

7. "If a man kidnaps someone, then sells that person as a slave or makes him his own slave, the man should be arrested and put to death. That's the only way to stop this sort of thing.

8-9. "If you break out with a skin disease and you think it's leprosy, go to the priest. He'll give you the rules to follow. That's what my sister, Miriam, had to do.

10-13. "If your neighbor asks you for a loan and you agree, don't go into his house to pick out what you want as a pledge. Let him decide. If he offers you his only blanket, don't take it, because he'll need that. He will thank you for your kindness, and God will be pleased.

14-15. "Don't take advantage of someone who works for you, whether he's an Israelite or not. Pay him an honest wage when it's due, because he needs the money to feed his family. Otherwise he'll tell the Lord about it, and you'll be guilty of stealing from him.

16. "Parents should not be punished for a crime committed by their children, nor should children be punished for what their parents have done. Each person is to be held responsible for his own actions.

17-18. "Don't take away the rights of foreigners or orphans living among you. Don't take the last thing a widow has as a pledge for a loan. Don't forget that you were slaves in Egypt, and you didn't like how you were treated. The Lord was kind to you. He wants you to be kind to others.

19. "When you harvest your crops and by mistake leave a bundle behind, don't go back to get it. Leave it for the poor. The Lord will bless you for it.

20-21. "When you pick olives or grapes, don't try to pick every last one. If you miss some, leave them for the widow, the orphans, and the poor.

22. "Don't forget that you were slaves in Egypt and knew what it was like to be hungry. The Lord wants you to think about others.

Laws for Different Situations

25 "Suppose two men have a problem and can't settle it between them. They should go to court and let the judge settle it. If it's necessary, the one who caused the problem should be whipped right in front of the judge, but not more than he deserves.

4. "Don't put a muzzle on an animal to keep it from eating grain while it's working for you.

5-6. "If two brothers own one property and one of them dies, his widow should not marry outside the family, or she'll lose what belongs to her. Her husband's brother should marry her. This way her share of the property will still belong to her.

7. "If the brother wants her to marry outside the family so he can have the property for himself, she should go and tell the city fathers about it.

8-10. "If the brother still refuses, she should take one of his sandals and spit in his face. He will always be remembered as the man with one sandal.

11-12. "If two men get into a fight and the wife comes to save her husband by grabbing the other man's private parts, and hurts the man so he can no longer be a father, the judge should order her hand to be cut off.

13-16. "Don't use scales and measuring rods that are not accurate. Do what is right, and the Lord will bless you.

17-19. "Don't forget what your enemies did to you when you came out of Egypt. They attacked those who were tired and worn out from traveling and were lagging behind. They had no respect for anyone and cer-

tainly not for God. So if your enemies attack you, destroy them, or they will attack you again.

Tithing

26 "When you settle in the land that the Lord will give you, take a sample of your crops that ripened first and bring them to the Lord in a basket. Say to the priest, 'This is from the land God has given us.'

4-6. "The priest will take your basket of samples and hold it up before the Lord. When he does this, you should say, 'Lord, our ancestors went to Egypt for food. But we were treated harshly and made slaves.'

7-10. "'You heard our cries and delivered us. You brought us out of Egypt by mighty miracles and gave us this rich and beautiful land. So, Lord, here is a sample of the crops You have blessed us with.' This will please the Lord and will help you remember what He has done for you.

11-12. "Then rejoice and be grateful and share your blessings with the Levites, orphans, widows, and aliens living among you. Every third year, set aside an extra tithe to help the poor so they won't have to go hungry.

13-15. "When you bring your regular tithe to the Lord, say, 'Lord, I have not kept any of the tithe for myself. And this third-year tithe is at home, set aside for the poor. I have not used it for anything else. Look down from heaven and bless our land.'

16-17. "The Lord wants to make sure that you do what is right, because He loves you. So obey Him with all your heart.

18-19. "By your obedience the Lord is telling the whole world that you belong to Him, that you are His special treasure. If you obey Him, He will make you greater than any other

nation. You are a holy people, set apart to be His own."

The Ten Commandments

27 Then Moses and the tribal leaders called the people together for final instructions. Moses said, "Follow the rules that I have given you the past few days. **2-3.** "Soon you will cross the Jordan River and go into the land God promised to give you. Set up a stone pillar, cover it with plaster, and write the Ten Commandments on it. Do this before you settle in the land.

4-8. "After you set up the stone pillar, build an altar next to it. Then bring your offerings and sacrifices and worship the Lord. Sit down and eat together and be happy and grateful for what the Lord has done for you. When you finish, then write the Ten Commandments on the pillar."

9-10. The priests and Levites joined Moses in telling the people that they should listen to what was being said. They told them that they were God's people and were special to Him. That's why they should obey Him and keep His commandments.

11-13. Then Moses said, "After you cross the Jordan River, six tribes should stand on one mountain and six tribes on the other. Six tribes should confirm the blessings, and the other six tribes the curses. This way everyone will take part.

14. "The priests from the tribe of Levi should stand in the valley below. The blessings and curses should be read with a loud voice so that everyone can hear.

The Curses

15. "'Cursed is he who makes gods out of wood, stone, or metal and worships them.

16. "'Cursed are those who dishonor their parents.

17. "'Cursed are those who move property lines.

18. "'Cursed are those who play tricks on blind people.

19. "'Cursed are those who take away the rights of aliens, orphans, and widows.

20. "'Cursed is the man who goes to bed with his stepmother.

21. "'Cursed is he who abuses animals and does so sleeping with them.

22-23. "'Cursed is the man who sleeps with his sister or mother-in-law.

24-25. "'Cursed is he who kills his neighbor secretly and then denies it. Cursed is he who kills someone for money.

26. "'Cursed are those who refuse to obey the Lord.' After each curse is read, six of the tribes will say, 'Amen.'"

The Blessings

28 Moses continued: "If you obey the Lord, He will make you a great people. Here are the blessings:

3. "'God will bless you in the city and in the country.

4. "'He will bless you with healthy children, flocks, and herds.

5. "'He will bless your vineyards and fields.

6. "'He will bless you in your travels.

7. "'He will protect you from your enemies.

8. "'He will bless your land and fill your barns.' After each blessing is read, the other six tribes should say, 'Amen.'

The Blessings Explained

9-10. "The Lord will bless you and make you a great nation. Other nations will know that He is blessing you and protecting you.

11. "He will bless your families and your animals.

12. "He will send the rain you need and will bless your work. You will not have to borrow money from other countries, but will lend money to them.

13. "He will make you the leading nation in the world as long as you obey Him.

14. "He will bless you if you don't turn away from Him and worship other gods.

The Curses Explained

15. "But if you disobey the Lord and do not keep His commandments, these curses will come on you:

16. "They will come on you in the city and in the country.

17. "They will come on your fruit trees, vineyards, and fields.

18. "They will come on your families, cattle, and sheep.

19. "They will come on you in your travels.

20. "Disasters will come on your nation and bring it to ruin.

21. "Diseases will come on you and your children, and epidemics will sweep across your country.

22. "You will never be without some kind of sickness, and heat and drought will destroy your crops.

23-24. "The sky will look like brass, and the ground will feel like iron. Your soil will turn to powder, and dust storms will ruin your land.

25-26. "Your enemies will attack you and scatter you in all directions. Other countries will hate you. Dead bodies of your soldiers will be everywhere.

27-29. "Your own bodies will be full of cancer, boils, and sores. You will suffer from blindness, deafness, and confusion.

30. "You will be engaged to a woman, and someone will take her from you

by force and abuse her. You will build a house, and someone will take it from you. You will plant a vineyard, and someone else will harvest the grapes.

31. "They will kill your cattle and steal your donkeys and sheep, and you won't be able to do anything about it.

32. "Your sons and daughters will be taken captive, and you'll never see them again.

33-34. "Nations you never even heard of will attack you and destroy your crops. All these troubles will drive you out of your mind.

35. "You will break out with sores from the soles of your feet to the top of your head.

36-37. "You will be scattered among many nations. People will hate you and make fun of you.

38-40. "Grasshoppers will eat your crops. Worms will destroy your vineyards. Your olives will fall off before they're ripe. Insects will destroy your trees and crops.

41. "Your enemies will take away your children.

42. "Grasshoppers will eat your fruits and vegetables.

43-44. "Foreigners living among you will succeed where you have failed. They will be the ones to lend you money. They will be the leaders and you the followers.

45. "All these things will happen to you. Armies will invade your country, and some of your tribes will disappear. This will happen because you turned away from the Lord and disobeyed Him.

46-47. "These things will tell you that the Lord was not pleased with you. They will happen because you were not happy serving Him, nor were you grateful for what He has done for you.

48. "So the Lord will let your enemies come and capture you. You will be

hungry, thirsty, poor, and half naked. Your work will be so hard that it will be like wearing an iron collar around your neck all day.

49-52. "The Lord will let a nation from far away come against you, a nation whose language you don't even know. Its army will sweep down on you like an eagle, showing no mercy to old or young. They will kill your cattle and destroy your crops. You will have little or nothing left. They will attack your cities and destroy them.

53-55. "You will be so hungry that you will eat your own babies. The most gentle fathers among you will get so hungry that they will take the food from their wives and children. They won't share it with anyone and will not care if they die.

56-57. "The most gentle mothers among you will act the same way. They will hide food from their husbands and children and watch them starve to death. That's how much things will change.

58. "So if you turn away from the Lord and refuse to listen to Him, you will lose the privilege of being the people of the Lord our God.

59-61. "Because He loves you, He will go to the trouble of disciplining you. He will do this by removing His blessings, and you'll come down with all kinds of diseases, some of which will be totally new.

62-63. "Even though there are so many of you (like the stars in the sky) few of you will be left, because you did not listen to the Lord your God. Once the Lord took pleasure in blessing you, and you multiplied. But He will destroy you and remove you from the land you're about to enter.

64-65. "He will scatter you everywhere, and you will be made to worship other gods that you haven't

even heard about. You will have no peace, and your life will be filled with worry. There will be nothing to look forward to.

66-67. "Day and night you will live in fear. Everywhere you look there will be nothing but trouble. When it gets dark, you will wish it were morning. And in the morning, you'll wish the day were over and it would be dark.

68. "The Lord will let you be taken back to Egypt to be sold as slaves, but no one will want to buy you."

God's Covenant

29 Just before the Israelites crossed the Jordan River to go into Canaan, Moses reminded them about the covenant that the Lord had made with their parents at Sinai.

2-3. He called them together and said, "When you left Egypt with your parents, you saw what the Lord did to the king. You saw the plagues, the miracles, and the other things the Lord did to set you free.

4-6. "Now forty years later you still don't understand why He did all this for you. All the years you camped in the wilderness your sandals never wore out. You didn't need money to buy bread, because you had manna. You didn't have alcoholic drinks, and you got along just fine. The Lord took care of you.

7-8. "When we got near the land of Canaan and were attacked, the Lord helped us defeat two powerful kings. We took their land and gave it to some of our tribes.

9. "So stay close to the Lord and hold on to the covenant He has made with us. Then He will continue to bless you.

10-12. "Today we will recommit ourselves to the Lord. This will include tribal leaders, men, women, children,

and the foreigners living among us. We will renew the same covenant God made with us at Sinai.

13-15. "He will confirm it for us with an oath, just as He did for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is renewing this covenant not only with you, but with all your descendants and with everyone who obeys Him.

16-18. "You remember what life was like in Egypt and what it's been like to face our enemies since then. You hated their lifeless gods. So stay away from idols. If you don't, that kind of worship will be as poison in your system that you can't get rid of.

19. "When you give yourselves anew to the Lord today, don't think that once you do that, you're secure and can do anything you want. You'll end up destroying yourself.

20. "Because you're God's family, the Lord isn't going to look the other way and let you do what you want. If you persist in doing evil, God will blot your name out of His record book.

21-23. "People passing through your country will see what the Lord had to do to you, even though you were His people. Your country will become a wasteland. Your cities will be destroyed and become like Sodom and Gomorrah.

24. "Neighboring nations will say, 'Why did the Lord do this to His own people? Look what happened to this rich and beautiful land. There must be a reason for this.'

25. "Then they'll answer their own question and say, 'It's because they turned away from God and didn't keep the covenant He made with them. They didn't love Him in spite of all He did for them.

26-28. "They worshiped idols and did as they pleased, so their God let all these things happen to their country.

He was not happy with what they did. He let them be conquered and carried into exile, which is where many of them are today.'

29. "There are some things the Lord has not told us, but the things we really need to know He has made very plain. He gave His law to us and to our children forever."

Conditions of the Covenant

30 Moses said, "The blessings and curses I've listed will happen, depending on your response to God. If you're captured and taken to other countries, it will be no one else's fault but your own.

2-5. "But even there, if you repent and return to the Lord with all your heart, He will forgive you and bring you back home, no matter where you are. He will bring you back to the land He gave you, and you will prosper even more than before.

6-7. "He will give you a new heart and help you to love Him with all your heart, soul, and mind. He will help you obey Him because He loves you. He wants you to live. He will let all the curses come on those who hate you and attack you.

8-10. "When you once again love and obey Him, He will bless you and your animals. Your harvests will be so large that you will have more than you need. The Lord will enjoy blessing you as He enjoyed blessing your ancestors. But all this will depend on whether or not you love Him and obey Him.

11-14. "What the Lord is asking you to do is not hard. He's not asking you to go up to heaven to find out what to do. He's not asking you to cross the ocean to look for some rules for your life. He has told you all you need to know. And I have written it all down

for you. So take it to heart and do it.

15-18. "The choice is yours. If you love Him with all your heart, He will bless you. If you give your heart to other things and don't keep His commandments, then your enemies will come and attack you and will take over your land.

19. "Today I'm calling heaven and earth to be my witness that I have given you the choice to love God and put Him first in your life, or not. So choose to love Him, and He will bless you.

20. "Give yourself wholly to Him. Listen to His word. Hold on to Him and don't let go, because the Lord is your life. He's the only one who can make you happy and bless your land, as He promised Abraham He would."

Joshua Takes Over

31 Then Moses said, "I'm now 120 years old and am not able to be your leader anymore. Besides, the Lord told me that I cannot go into Canaan with you.

3-5. "But He will go with you and give you the land He promised. Joshua will be your new leader. The Lord will help you as He did when you defeated the two powerful kings whose land you already have. And He will do the same again.

6. "Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid. The Lord is with you. He won't let you go into Canaan alone."

7-8. Then Moses asked Joshua to come, and he said to him, "Be strong and of good courage. The Lord has chosen you to take these people into Canaan. So go in and possess the land. The Lord will go with you. He won't leave you, so don't be afraid."

9-11. Then Moses finished writing down the the rest of the laws and gave them to the priests in charge of

the ark. He said to them, "Every seventh year, when the land rests and all the debts are canceled, read these laws to the people so they won't forget them.

12-13. "Everyone needs to hear these laws—men, women, children, and the foreigners living among you. Some will have never heard them. They need to, so they will know how to love and respect the Lord. They need to know that they are God's people."

14-15. Then the Lord said to Moses, "The time has come. You have only a few more days left. Call Joshua and come with him to the sanctuary." So the two of them went and stood before the Lord.

16. God said to Moses, "Listen carefully. You are about to go to sleep as your ancestors have done. Only a few generations from now the people will forget the covenant we have made and will worship other gods.

17-18. "When they do this, I will have to withdraw My protection. Then some terrible things will happen to them. Finally, they will say, 'All these things are happening to us because we have turned away from the Lord.' I will not be able to help them while they are turning to other gods.

19-20. "I want you to write down this song and teach it to the people to help them remember what I have said. Once they settle in the land and have plenty to eat, they will forget about Me and will worship other gods.

21. "When tragedies come, this song will remind them of Me and what I have said. It will stand as evidence against them. It will never be forgotten. I know what they will do even before they do it."

22. So Moses wrote the song and taught it to the people.

23. Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Be

strong and courageous, because I will go with you, as I promised I would."

24-26. When Moses finished writing the rest of the law as well as the song, he gave them to the Levites who carried the ark. He said, "Take this book and put it beside the ark as a reminder of what the Lord has said.

27. "I know how stubborn and determined these people can be once they make up their minds. If they rebelled against the Lord when I was with them, how much more they will do it when I'm gone.

28. "Call together the tribal leaders so I can talk to them one last time. Heaven will be my witness that I'm against anything that will take the people away from God.

29. "I know what will happen when I'm gone. They will worship other gods and do all kinds of wicked things. They will bring terrible troubles on themselves because they'll do what they were told not to do."

30. Then Moses read the laws of God to the leaders one last time. When he finished, he called the people together and taught them the song God told him to write.

The Song of Moses

32 "Listen, O heavens, and I will speak. Hear, O earth, what I have to say.

2. "Let my teachings drop like rain, my words fresh as the morning dew. Let them be as showers of rain on young grass, as gentle rain on new plants.

3-4. "I will proclaim the name of the Lord and the greatness of our God. He is our Rock, and what He does is perfect. He is a God of truth, righteousness, and justice.

5-6. "But His people have sinned and are unworthy to be called God's people. They like to have their own way,

to do their own thing. Is this how they should repay the Lord? How foolish can they be? Is He not their Father? Did He not make them and save them?

7. "Remember the past, the people who lived long ago. Ask your father; he will tell you. Ask the elders; they will tell you.

8-9. "Long ago the Creator decided where people should live. He separated the sons of Adam and assigned the nations their lands. He divided the human race and set borders for the people. He also gave land to Israel according to their families.

10. "He found them abandoned in Egypt. He delivered them and brought them safely through the wilderness. He watched over them, and they are precious to Him.

11-12. "The eagle teaches her young to fly by pushing them out of the nest. She catches them on her wings when they fall. This is what the Lord has done for His people.

13-14. "He fed them by blessing their fields. He gave them honey, oil, milk, wheat, and the finest grapes. He blessed their flocks and herds until they were the best.

15-18. "But when they became comfortable, they also became rebellious. They grew fat and turned against the God who had saved them. They worshiped other gods and turned against Him who had set them free.

19-20. "When the Lord saw all this, He could no longer call them His loyal children. He said, 'I will hide My face in shame for what they have done. They are an ungrateful people who do not trust Me.

21. "'They are worshiping idols—gods they have made. They will be jealous when I give their blessings to others. They will even become angry.

22. "'The time will come when I will

take care of sin. I will consume all wickedness with a fire that cannot be put out. The wicked will perish, and the earth will burn.

23-25. "'Before then I will discipline My people. I will let disasters, famines, and disease come. I will not protect them from wild animals or poisonous snakes.

26-27. "'Wars will erupt, their children will be killed, and their old people will suffer. But I will not let My people be destroyed, or their enemies would rejoice.'

28-29. "God's people have not listened to counsel. They do not understand truth. If they were wise, they would consider where their behavior is taking them.

30-31. "Can one man chase a thousand or two men ten thousand? The enemies of God's people can do this to them because the Lord, like a mighty Rock, is not at their side. Our enemies know this.

32-33. "Israel's enemies are corrupt. They are like the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, like grapes full of poison. The wine they serve is like the venom of cobras.

34. "The Lord will not forget what Israel's enemies have done to His people. He will keep His weapons in reserve until the time comes for Him to use them.

35. "The Lord said, 'I will repay. The feet of Israel's enemies will slip. Their day will come. Their doom is sure.'

36. "The Lord will judge, and He is on the side of His people. He will have compassion on those who love Him. He sees how helpless they are without Him.

37-38. "He will say to His people, 'Where are the gods you made, the ones you worshiped and gave your best efforts to? Where are the gods

you told your children to worship? Let those gods come and help you.

39-40. "Why can't you see that there is no living god beside Me? I am the only one. I can give life or I can take it away. I can wound, or I can heal. No one can stop what I decide to do. I am the one who never dies.

41-42. "I will see to it that justice is done. I will confront My enemies and repay them for what they have done. I will not overlook those who fight against Me and My people."

43. "Let everyone in heaven and on earth bow down and worship the Lord. He will forgive His people their sins and will defeat their enemies. The Lord forgives everyone who loves Him."

Time for Moses to Die

44-46. This was the song that Moses wrote and taught the people with Joshua by his side. When he finished, he said to the people, "Take all these things to heart and don't forget them. Teach them to your children and grandchildren.

47. "These are not just empty words. They are your very life. You are to live by them. Then the Lord will bless you with long life in the land He is about to give you."

48-49. That same day the Lord said to Moses, "Come up the mountain toward the side of Jericho. I will help your eyes see the whole land of Canaan. You will see the future of My people to the end of time, even the new Land of Canaan—the earth made new.

50-51. "Then I will put you to sleep. It was not My plan to do this. But you disobeyed Me when you struck the rock to bring out water, and then took credit for the miracle. If I overlooked this, people would put their faith in you and not in Me.

52. "That is why I cannot let you go into Canaan, but I will let you see it."

Moses' Last Blessing

33 Then Moses blessed the people one last time. He recalled, "The Lord came down on Mount Sinai. His presence was as radiant as the sun. Thousands of angels were at His side, and a blazing fire surrounded Him.

3. "The Lord really loves His people. He watches over them and holds them in the palm of His hand. They sit at His feet and listen to His words.

4-5. "He wrote down His law. It belongs to us. The Lord is the king of Israel."

6-7. Then Moses prayed for the people, "Lord, bless the tribe of Reuben, as there are so few of them. Bless the people of Judah and give them courage to face their enemies. Bless the Simeonites, who live among their brethren in Judah.

8-9. "Bless the tribe of Levi. They were loyal to You at Sinai. They loved You more than their father and mother.

10-11. "They teach Your people to keep Your laws and they care for Your sanctuary. They offer sacrifices and pray for Your people. Bless them and give them wisdom and skill to carry on Your work. Turn against those who turn against them.

12-15. "Lord, bless the tribe of Benjamin. Carry them on Your shoulders and protect them. Bless the descendants of Joseph, who make up the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim. Bless their crops. Let the sun ripen their fruit. Cover their hills with fine vineyards.

16-17. "Fill their land with all that is good. Joseph was sold as a slave. Yet he was a prince of a son. He was strong like a bull. His sons are

like two horns of a young ox, afraid of nothing.

18-19. "Bless the tribes of Zebulun and Issachar. Bless them in their business as they trade by land and sea. They love to invite people to their homes and help them with what they need.

20-21. "Lord, bless the tribe of Gad. Enlarge their territory. They willingly fought like lions by the side of their brothers. They keep Your word.

22-23. "Bless the tribe of Dan. They are like young lions who need to be guided. Bless the tribe of Naphtali again, even though You have blessed them already.

24-25. "Bless the tribe of Asher, and may they increase. May their brothers appreciate them. May they stay strong throughout all their days."

26-28. Then Moses said, "There is not a god like the God of Israel who comes to help us when we need Him. The eternal God is our refuge. His everlasting arms hold us up. Because of Him, Israel will live in peace. Their land will be full of grain and grapes watered by the Lord.

29. "O Israel, how blessed you are! Who else is like you, saved by the God of heaven? He is your shield and sword. He will help you defeat your enemies and inherit the land of Canaan."

The Death of Moses

34 After Moses had blessed the people and prayed for them, he climbed silently and alone up the mountain. From there the Lord helped him see the whole country of Canaan. He saw all the territories his people would receive, from north to south, from east to west, and along the whole valley of Jordan.

4. Then the Lord said to him, "This is the land I promised to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I have let you see it, but I can't let you go in."

5-6. So Moses died on top of the mountain, and the Lord buried him in a valley in the land of Moab. No one has ever found his grave. Then God resurrected him and took him to heaven.

7-8. Moses was 120 years old when he died, yet his eyesight was still good, and he was still strong. The people mourned for him for a whole month before they broke camp to go into the Promised Land.

9. Joshua took Moses' place and was filled with the Holy Spirit and with much wisdom. Moses had laid his hands on him in front of all the people, as God had asked him to do.

10-12. But there was never again a leader like Moses to whom the Lord spoke directly. No one ever did such miracles by the power of God as Moses did in Egypt, and later, in the sight of God's people.

Joshua

INTRODUCTION: *This book was written by Joshua, who led the Israelites across the Jordan River into the land of Canaan, about 1400 B.C. In this book we learn how God opened the river so the people could cross over, and how He helped the Israelites defeat the Canaanites. Also we learn how the walls of the city of Jericho came tumbling down, and that the sun stood still for a whole day until the Israelites defeated their enemies. Before Joshua died, he divided the land among the tribes and told the people to be sure to serve the Lord.*

Joshua, the New Leader

1 After the death of Moses, the Lord said to Joshua, "I want you to take My people across the Jordan River into the land of Canaan. I told Moses I would give them the land I promised their ancestors.

4. "The borders will stretch from the mountains in the north to the desert in the south, and from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west.

5-6. "I will be with you just as I was with Moses. I will never leave you or forsake you. So be strong and courageous, and take My people into the land I promised them.

7. "Be sure to keep all My commandments and laws that Moses gave you. Don't turn to the right or to the left, and I will give you wisdom and help you succeed.

8. "Don't forget to read what Moses wrote. Do it in the morning and at night, so you won't forget what I said. I will bless you and give you success.

9. "What did I just ask you to do? I told you to be strong and courageous and not to be afraid. Don't get discouraged, because I will be with you every step of the way."

10-11. So Joshua called for the leaders of Israel, saying, "Go and tell the

people to start packing, because in three days we will cross the Jordan River and go into the land the Lord promised to give us."

12-15. Then he spoke to the tribes who had settled east of Jordan and said, "What did Moses tell you? He said that the Lord let you settle here, but that you must help your brothers get their land, just as they helped you get yours. After that, you may come back to join your families."

16-18. The leaders said, "We'll go wherever you ask us to go. We'll listen to you just as we did to Moses. The Lord will be with you as He was with him. If any of our men disobey you, we will deal with them. So be strong and courageous as you lead us into the land that the Lord has promised to give us."

The Spies

2 Then Joshua sent two spies across Jordan to find out what the defenses of the city of Jericho were like. The spies slipped into the city and stopped at a place owned by a woman named Rahab. Someone told the king that two strangers were staying at her house.

3. So the king sent some soldiers to check it out. They told Rahab they

wanted to talk to the two strangers because they were sure they were spies.

4-5. The men were hiding upstairs. Rahab said, "I don't know where the men are. They checked in last night, but they didn't tell me where they were from. They must have slipped back out the city gates before the king ordered them closed. If you hurry, you might catch them."

6-7. Rahab knew where they were, because she had hidden them under a pile of straw on her flat roof. The soldiers took off to find the men and went all the way to the Jordan River looking for them. As soon as they went out the city gates, the guards closed them again.

8-10. That night Rahab went up on the roof and said to the men, "We all know that God has given you this land. So the people are afraid. We heard what God did in Egypt, and how He parted the Red Sea for you. We also know that you defeated two powerful kings the other side of Jordan."

11. "When we heard all this, our hearts sank, and we lost all hope of defeating you. We know that your God is the God of heaven and earth."

12-13. "Please be kind to me and my family when you attack our city. I believe in your God and have been kind to you. Please give me something as a sign that you will spare my parents and brothers and sisters and their families."

14-15. The two men promised they would be kind to her family if she didn't tell that they had been there to spy out the city. Then she let them down through the window using a rope, because her little house was built on the thick city wall.

16. Before they left she said, "Don't go straight home, but head for the hill country and stay there for three days."

The soldiers won't give up that easily, but will keep looking for you."

17-19. The men said, "Take this red cord and tie it to your window. When you see our troops coming, bring your parents and your brothers and sisters and their families into your house. If they leave and are killed, don't blame us."

20-21. "Remember, don't tell we were here, or we won't keep our promise." Rahab agreed, and as soon as the men left, she tied the red cord to her window.

22. The two men lowered themselves from the window, ran to the hills, and stayed there for three days, as Rahab had told them to. The soldiers finally gave up looking for them and went back to Jericho.

23-24. Then the men crossed the Jordan River and made their way back to camp. They told Joshua everything that had happened, and said, "We know that the Lord has given us this land, because the people have lost their courage and are afraid."

Crossing the Jordan

3 Early the next morning the people broke camp, and Joshua led them toward the Jordan River. When they got there, they set up camp again and spent two days getting ready to cross. On the third day the leaders said to the people,

3-4. "When you see the priests pick up the ark, you need to get in line according to your tribes and follow them. This is enemy territory, so we need to stay together. The priests will go first, and we'll follow at some distance. No one should go ahead or get too close to the ark."

5. Then Joshua said to the people, "Commit yourselves and your families to the Lord, because tomorrow

morning He will take us across the river into the land of Canaan. And you'll see some amazing things."

6. The next morning Joshua said to the priests, "We're ready to go. Pick up the ark and carry it toward the river ahead of the people."

7-8. Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Today I will confirm your leadership among the people. Tell the priests to step into the swollen river. As soon as their feet touch the water, the river will divide ahead of them. They should carry the ark to the middle of the river and stop."

9-10. Joshua said to the people, "Let me tell you what the Lord said. The Jordan River will part in front of you, just as the Red Sea did years before. This will be a sign to you that the Lord can drive the people out of the land as easily as He can part a swollen river."

11-13. "The priests will carry the ark into the river ahead of you. For now, pick out one man from each tribe. Later I'll tell them what to do. As soon as the feet of the priests touch the water, the river will divide, and you may walk over on dry ground. The Lord will hold the water back for you. Don't be afraid."

14-15. So the people made their way toward the river, with the priests leading the way. This was the time of the spring rains, and the river was near flood stage. But as soon as the priests' feet touched the water, the river began to divide.

16-17. The water that came down from the mountain stood still and backed up for miles to the village of Adam near Zaretan. The water flowing downstream ran on toward the Dead Sea so that the people could walk across on dry ground. This happened not far from the city of

Jericho. The priests stood in the middle of the riverbed until all the people had crossed.

Memorial Stones

4 After all the people had safely crossed, the Lord said to Joshua, "Call the twelve men the people chose and have them go to the middle of the river where the priests are. Each man should pick up one large stone and carry it to where you'll pitch camp for the night."

4-5. Joshua told the men what the Lord had said. Then he explained, "The twelve big stones will be set up as a monument to remind us what the Lord has done for us."

6-7. "So when our children ask what these rocks are for, we can tell them how the Lord opened the Jordan River for us to walk across on dry ground. We will remember that these rocks came from the middle of the river where the priests stood."

8-9. The men did as Joshua said. They went and picked up twelve big stones from the middle of the river and carried them to camp. Then Joshua set the stones up as a memorial of what the Lord had done. Years later these stones were still there.

10-11. The priests carried the ark to the middle of the river and stayed there until all the people had safely crossed. Then they carried the ark to the other side, and the people watched as the waters came down from upstream and the river began flowing again.

12-14. The fighting men from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh also crossed the river to help their brothers, as Moses had told them to. What happened that day made the people respect Joshua just as they had respected Moses.

15-18. It was after everyone had safely crossed that the Lord said to Joshua, "Tell the priests to leave the river." Joshua did, and the priests came out carrying the ark. As soon as their feet touched shore, the waters came crashing down and flooded the whole area where the children of Israel had camped.

19-22. This happened on the tenth day of the first month, just four days before the Passover. That night the people camped where Joshua had set up the twelve rocks. He said to them, "If your children ask you what these stones mean, tell them that they came from the middle of the river when it was at flood stage.

23-24. "Tell them how the Lord your God opened the Jordan River so you could walk over on dry ground, just as your parents crossed the Red Sea. Tell them that the Lord did this so people everywhere would hear about it and respect Him."

Camped Near Jericho

5 When the kings on both sides of the Jordan River heard how God had opened the river so the children of Israel could walk across on dry ground, they became afraid.

2-3. Then the Lord said to Joshua, "All those who have not yet been circumcised should be circumcised before we start taking the land." Joshua told the people what the Lord had said, and that's what they did.

4-7. Those who had come out of Egypt had already been circumcised. But forty years had passed since the Israelites had left Egypt, and now the younger generation had to be circumcised. The older people who had been afraid to go in and take the land had died.

8-9. After this, the Lord said to

Joshua, "Now I will roll away the dishonor that fell on Me when My people refused to go into Canaan." So they called the place Gilgal, meaning Rolled Away.

10-12. On the fourteenth of the first month, the children of Israel kept the Passover as a reminder of what the Lord had done to free them from Egypt. The next day they ate food grown in Canaan, and that same day the manna stopped falling from heaven.

13. One morning Joshua left the camp to pray about what to do next, when a huge soldier with a drawn sword appeared in the valley. Joshua walked closer to the man and called out, "Are you for us or against us?"

14. The soldier said, "Neither one. I am the Commander of the Lord's army." Joshua fell on his knees, bowed to the ground, and worshiped Him. He knew that it was the Lord and that He had come to lead His people. Then he said, "Lord, what are Your orders?"

15. The Lord said, "Take off your sandals. You're standing on holy ground." So Joshua did as he was told.

The Fall of Jericho

6 In the meantime, the people of Jericho had shut the gates, and no one could go out or come in.

3-4. Then the Lord said to Joshua, "I have given the city of Jericho into your hands. March your men around the city once a day for six days. The fighting units should go first, then seven priests with rams' horns, followed by the ark and the rear guard. The only sound will be marching feet and an occasional blast of the rams' horns. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times.

5. "Then stop, have the priests give a long blast on the rams' horns, fol-

lowed by a shout from the troops, and the walls will collapse. As soon as they do, the troops should storm the city from all directions."

6-7. Joshua called the priests together and told them what the Lord had said. He told them he needed some priests to carry the ark and seven others to go in front with rams' horns. Then he told his officers and troops to get ready to march around the city.

8-9. After everyone knew what to do, the priests lined up with the ark and the rams' horns. Then the troops took their positions. They began to march around the city, making no sound except their marching feet and an occasional blast of the rams' horns.

10-14. Joshua had told them not to make noise until the signal for them to give the war cry. The first day the priests and the troops marched around the city one time and then went back to camp. They did the same thing each day for six days.

15-16. On the seventh day they got up at sunrise. Before they started marching around the city, Joshua told them that this time they would march around seven times, and at the end of the seventh time the priests would give a long blast on the rams' horns. Then they should give a loud war cry, and the city walls would collapse.

17-19. He told them to destroy everything in the city because the whole place was full of witchcraft and demons. But Rahab and her family should be saved, because she had protected the two spies. Nothing should be taken from the city except items of silver, gold, brass, and iron, which would be gifts to the Lord.

20. After the priests and the troops had marched around the city seven times, Joshua ordered them to stop and face the city walls. The trumpets

sounded a long blast, and the troops shouted the war cry. The walls of Jericho shook and then collapsed.

21. The troops stormed the city from all directions and destroyed everything in it, including all sheep, cattle, and people.

22-23. Joshua said to the two spies, "Go find Rahab and her family." The two men ran into the city, found her, and brought her and her family out close to the Hebrew camp, where they would be safe.

24. Joshua then ordered the city set on fire and everything in it burned up, except what they had saved for the Lord.

25. Rahab and her family were saved because she had risked her life to save the two spies. God helped her grow into a true believer, and she became an ancestor of David.

26. Then Joshua said, "Cursed be the man who tries to rebuild this wicked city. When he lays the foundation his oldest son will die, and when he puts up the city gates his youngest will die."

27. So the Lord was with Joshua as He had been with Moses, and his fame spread everywhere.

Israelites Defeated

7 Some of the children of Israel didn't listen, particularly Achan. He took some things from Jericho for himself and hid them. The Lord saw it and was not pleased. So He withdrew His blessings from all Israel. **2-3.** Joshua didn't know this. He sent some of his troops to spy out the city of Ai and bring back a report. When they returned, they said, "The city is so small that we don't have to send the whole army to take it. Two or three thousand men can handle it."

4-5. Without asking the Lord, Joshua sent some of his troops to take the city of Ai. But to his surprise they were de-

feated, and thirty-six of his men were killed. When the troops came home and the people heard what had happened, their hearts sank.

6. Joshua and the tribal leaders tore their robes in grief. They fell on their knees before the ark and cried. They stayed there all day until late in the afternoon praying.

7. Joshua said, "Lord, why did You let this happen? We know You didn't bring us out here to have us killed. Maybe we should have stayed on the other side of Jordan.

8-9. "What can I say when my best men turn and run? Once the Caananites hear about this, they will attack us from all sides, and we'll be defeated. Then what will happen to Your reputation as the God of heaven and earth?"

10-12. The Lord said, "Get up off your knees. Israel has sinned. They took things out of Jericho and hid them and lied about it. Your troops were defeated because I wasn't there to help them.

13-14. "Tell the people to sanctify themselves, because I want to talk to them. They can't defeat their enemies because of the things they took from Jericho. Tomorrow morning I want to meet with all of them. I will point out the guilty tribe, the clan, the family, and the man.

15. "This will give the one who is guilty and his family time to think and repent. If they don't, they should be arrested and executed. And everything they own should be burned. They have disregarded My word and brought disgrace on all Israel."

16-18. Early the next morning Joshua and the people came before the Lord by tribes. The Lord picked the tribe of Judah. Then He picked the clan, the family, and finally Achan as the guilty one.

19-21. Joshua said to Achan, "Son, tell me what you have done to bring this defeat on us. Confess your sin. Don't try to hide it." At first Achan said nothing, but finally he said, "I disobeyed. I took a magical robe and five pounds of silver and some gold and buried them in my tent."

22-23. Joshua sent some men to Achan's tent and found the things buried where he had said they were. They brought everything to Joshua for the people to see. Achan did not admit that he had done something wrong until he could no longer hide it.

24. So Joshua and the tribal leaders took Achan, the things from Jericho, his family, and everything he owned to a nearby valley.

25. Joshua asked, "Why did you and your family bring all this trouble on Israel? Not one of you seems to be sorry for what you have done. We have no choice but to carry out the sentence." Then Achan and his family were stoned, and their bodies and all their possessions were burned.

26. Rocks were piled over their bodies and were there for years as a reminder of what Achan had done. People called the valley "The Place of Trouble." Then the Lord once again blessed Israel.

The Fall of Ai

8 Later that day the Lord said to Joshua, "Don't be discouraged. Take your troops and attack Ai again, and I will help you. Do the same thing to Ai that you did to Jericho. Destroy the city, but you may keep the plunder for yourselves. This time attack the city from a different direction."

3-4. So that's what Joshua did. He picked 30,000 troops and told 5,000 of

them to leave while it was still dark and go to the west side of Ai. In the morning he and the rest of them would approach from the north.

5-9. He said, "When the men of Ai see me coming, they'll attack us as they did before. I'll order a retreat, and they'll come out of the city after us. Then those of you lying in ambush should attack. You'll have no trouble taking the city. Then set it on fire. So get ready to go." The smaller group left, while the other group waited until morning.

10-13. Early the next morning Joshua took the other troops and marched toward Ai. The people could see them coming. So with the smaller group west of the city and the larger group on the north, everything was ready as planned.

14-17. When the king of Ai saw the Israelite troops, he rounded up every man he could. They left the city, headed toward the Israelites, and attacked. He didn't know about the other Israelites who were hiding. Then Joshua gave the signal to his men to retreat, and the men from Ai chased after them, leaving the gates of the city wide open.

18-19. The Lord said to Joshua, "Now give the signal for the men who are hiding to come out and attack." Joshua raised his spear over his head and pointed it toward the city. The Israelite men in ambush came rushing out and attacked. They stormed through the gates and set the city on fire.

20-21. When the men from Ai turned, they saw their city on fire. Joshua's troops now turned and attacked the men from Ai. They too had seen the fire and knew what had happened.

22-23. The Israelites who had set the city on fire now attacked the men of Ai from behind. So they were caught in the middle. The Israelites fought

and killed all the enemy troops and captured the king.

24-26. Then they returned to the city and destroyed what was left, because the place had been full of witchcraft. They went through the whole city to make sure there were no survivors.

27-28. They took the cattle and other things for themselves, just as the Lord had told them to do. So the city was completely destroyed, and it was never rebuilt.

29. The king of Ai was executed by hanging. At sundown they took his body down and buried it under a huge pile of rocks by the city gates. Years later the pile of rocks was still there.

God's Covenant Renewed

30-32. After this Joshua built an altar and a monument on top of a nearby mountain, as Moses had told him to. He built both of them out of stones and covered the monument with plaster. He offered sacrifices on the altar and wrote the Ten Commandments and other words from Moses on the monument.

33. Then he asked the people to divide according to tribes. Half of them stood on one mountain and the other half on another mountain. The priests and Levites stood in the valley with the ark.

34-35. Joshua read the Ten Commandments and the words from Moses with the blessings for obedience and the consequences for disobedience. He didn't skip one word. He read loud enough for everyone to hear. This included the women and children, whether they were Israelites or foreigners.

A Friendship Treaty

9 When the other kings in Canaan heard what had happened to Jericho and Ai, they decided to join forces against Israel. This in-

cluded the kings from the mountains to the Mediterranean coast.

3. But the people of nearby Gibeon decided to make a friendship treaty with Israel. They got a delegation ready to send to Joshua, pretending to be from cities beyond the land of Canaan.

4-5. They loaded their donkeys with old household goods and used worn saddlebags, and carried mended water bags. They also wore patched sandals and clothes, and took moldy bread with them.

6-7. When they got to the Israelite camp, they said to Joshua and the tribal leaders, "We have come a long way and have traveled many days to make a friendship treaty with you." The Israelite leaders said, "Why should we make a treaty with you? How do we know you're not lying? Maybe you live near here."

8-10. They answered, "We're here to serve you, not to fight you." Joshua asked, "But where are you from?" They replied, "We've come a long way. We want to make a treaty with you because we heard how God brought you out of Egypt and helped you defeat the two powerful Amorite kings.

11-13. "So our leaders sent us here to make a friendship treaty with you. We're willing to be your servants, so please don't refuse our offer. Just look at the bread that was fresh when we left and see how moldy it is, and at our old drinking containers and worn sandals and clothes."

14-15. Joshua and the tribal leaders looked carefully and, without consulting God, were convinced that these men were telling the truth. So they went ahead and made a treaty with them and took an oath not to attack their cities.

16-17. Three days after the delegation

went back home Joshua heard that they were from the nearby city of Gibeon and three neighboring towns. So he sent a large fighting force to find out the truth. They split into four groups, and after an all-night march they finally got there.

18. They verified where the delegation had come from and that they had lied, but did not attack because of the oath that Joshua and the leaders had taken. So they returned home and told Joshua what they had found. When the people heard about it, they were upset with what their leaders had done.

19-20. The leaders responded, "We took an oath to accept these people as our friends and not to attack them. If we attack them, people could not depend on our word. Even God's character would be questioned. We admit we didn't pray about it, but we can't break our oath.

21. "The best thing we can do is to have them serve us. It was their suggestion. They can do our manual labor—chopping wood and carrying water." So Joshua and the leaders kept their word and did not break their oath.

22-23. Then Joshua sent for the Gibeonite leaders. When they came, he said to them, "Why did you lie to us? We will keep our oath, but because of what you did, you will work for us as you suggested. But you can't have all the privileges other foreigners who live with us do. You will always have to do manual labor."

24-25. They said, "We were told that God had promised Moses to give you all this land. So our people got scared. That's why we did what we did. So we are now yours. You may do with us what seems right."

26-27. Joshua accepted the Gibeonites

as friends and did not let Israel attack them or hurt them. So throughout the years they worked for Israel doing whatever work needed to be done.

The Sun Stands Still

10 When the king of Jerusalem heard that Joshua had taken Jericho and had made a friendship treaty with the Gibeonites, he got scared.

3-5. So he contacted four other kings and said to them, "Let's attack those Gibeonites who made friends with Joshua." They agreed, marched their armies over to Gibeon, and took their positions, ready to attack.

6-7. When the Gibeonites heard what was happening, they sent word to Joshua and said, "Come and help us. Five kings are attacking us. Hurry!" Joshua took the whole army and left that night for Gibeon.

8-9. The Lord said to Joshua, "Don't be afraid of those five kings. I'll help you." After an all-night march, Joshua ordered his men to attack. This caught the five kings totally by surprise.

10-11. The Lord confused their thinking, and Joshua had no trouble defeating them. His troops chased them for miles. As they ran, the Lord sent huge hailstones so that more died from the hailstones than from battle.

12-13. The Lord gave Joshua victory over these kings. Joshua had asked, "Lord, please make the sun and the moon to stand still to give us more time." The Lord heard his prayer and made the sun and moon stand still to give Joshua a double day to defeat the five kings. All this is written in a book and recorded.

14. Never in all history has there been a day like the day that God stopped the sun and moon to help His people. No one doubted that the

God of Israel was the God of heaven and earth.

15. After the battle Joshua marched his troops back home.

Five Kings Hide

16-18. When the five kings saw that many of their troops had been killed, they hid in a cave, hoping that no one would find them. But someone told Joshua where they were. He ordered his special forces to go to the cave, roll some big stones in front of the entrance, and post a guard.

19-21. He also said, "Go after any enemy troops that are left. Don't let them get back to their cities." Joshua's forces caught up with most of them, but a few escaped and made it back to their cities. Then Joshua's men gave him a report of their mission. After this, no one dared make fun of Israel or of God.

22-24. Joshua didn't forget about the five kings. At the end of the day he ordered his men to bring out the five kings. He made the kings lie facedown and asked his officers to come and place their feet on the necks of the kings as a sign of victory.

25. Joshua said to his men, "Don't ever be afraid or discouraged. The Lord will do the same to all who fight against you as He did to these kings."

26-27. Then Joshua executed the five kings and hung their bodies on five trees for all to see. Before sunset he had the bodies taken down and thrown into the cave. He then ordered large rocks to be piled up at the entrance. These rocks were there for years to come.

Joshua Conquers Other Cities

28-33. Joshua and his troops went on to take other cities in that area of Canaan. They took all of them and did

the same to them as they had done to Jericho. At one place one king raced to the defense of another king, but Joshua defeated them both.

34-39. From there Joshua and his men went on to other cities, and the Lord always gave them the victory. They destroyed these cities the same way as the others.

40-43. So Joshua took all the cities in that part of Canaan from the mountains to the plains, but only because the Lord was with him. Then Joshua and his men returned home to join their families back at Gilgal.

More Territory Taken

11 The news of Joshua's victory over the five kings spread throughout the land. When the kings in the mountains heard about it, one of them sent word to the others to join him against the Israelites. They all agreed and made one gigantic army with a large number of horses and chariots. Then they got ready to attack.

6. The Lord knew this. He said to Joshua, "Don't be afraid. Tomorrow I will give these kings into your hands. But don't keep their horses and chariots for your army. If you do, you'll put your trust in your horses instead of in Me. I want you to burn the chariots and make the horses unfit for war."

7-9. Joshua quickly got his troops ready to attack. The Lord was with Joshua. He defeated the kings and killed their troops until not one was left. He set their chariots on fire and made their horses unfit for war, as the Lord had said.

10-13. Then he attacked the city of the king who had started it all, killed him; and set his city on fire. He also captured the cities of all the other kings who had helped this one, but he

did not set their cities on fire.

14-15. Joshua's men were allowed to take whatever rewards of war they wanted. But no one who lived in those wicked cities was left alive. Nothing that the Lord had told Moses to do was left undone.

16-18. So Joshua took that whole mountain area in the north and a large part of Canaan in the south. He also took the areas around the Sea of Galilee, the mountains around Jerusalem, and the valley of Lebanon. It took a long time to do this.

19. The only area that he did not take was Gibeon, because of the friendship treaty he had made with their people.

20. The people of Canaan had turned against God so much that they didn't want to repent and change their ways. The most important thing to them was to kill God's people. That's why God had told Moses to destroy these cities.

21-22. It was also during this time that Joshua defeated the race of giants that the Israelites had been so afraid of when they had come out of Egypt forty years before. Not one of these giants survived, except a few along the Mediterranean coast.

23. Then Joshua divided the land among the tribes as Moses had told him to do. The fighting finally stopped, and there was peace in the land.

Conquered Kings

12 Now the land east of the Jordan River had been taken by Moses when he defeated the two powerful Amorite kings. It covered a large territory and was given to the tribes of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh.

7-24. The land west of the Jordan River was taken by Joshua, who de-

feated five kings near Gibeon and the kings in the mountains to the north. He also took the territory to the south, the valley of Lebanon, and the area around the Sea of Galilee and Jerusalem. Altogether he took thirty-one cities, not counting smaller towns and villages.

Land Still Left

13 By now Joshua was very old. One day the Lord said to him, "There are still large areas of Canaan to be taken and settled. But you're too old to keep on fighting.

3-7. "Some parts of Canaan still needing to be taken are close to Egypt in the south, by the Mediterranean Sea to the west, and around Mount Hermon in the north. I will help My people take these areas so that all the tribes may have their inheritance."

8-13. Now Moses had given the tribes of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh their inheritance east of the Jordan River where the two powerful kings had been defeated. But these tribes did not take all the land that was given them. So some of the local people continued to live there.

The Land East of Jordan

14. The only tribe that Moses did not give an inheritance to was the tribe of Levi, because they were assigned to the sanctuary and lived off the tithes and offerings that the people gave to the Lord.

15-23. The territory of Reuben included many cities from the Arabian Desert on the east to the Dead Sea on the west.

24-28. The territory of Gad included many cities from the Arabian Desert on the east to the Jordan River on the west.

29-31. The territory of half the tribe

of Manasseh included many cities, including sixty towns and villages from the Arabian Desert on the east to the Lake of Galilee on the west.

32-33. This is how Moses divided the land east of the Jericho for two and a half tribes before the rest of the tribes crossed the Jordan River to go into Canaan. But he did not give any land to the tribe of Levi, because they were assigned to the sanctuary.

The Land of Canaan

14 The land of Canaan was divided among the other tribes by Joshua, the high priest, and the tribal leaders. Moses told them to do that by drawing lots. Two and a half tribes had already been given their land east of Canaan.

4-5. The two sons of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim, were each given their own land. The tribe of Levi did not receive land, because they were asked to live in all the tribal lands to serve the people. The rest of the land was divided among the other tribes.

6-8. Then Caleb said to Joshua, "Remember what Moses said to the two of us when we came back from spying out the land of Canaan? We gave an honest report full of hope. The other ten spies gave a report that scared the people.

9-12. "Because of this, Moses promised to give us the very land that we had spied out. That was about forty-five years ago. Now I'm eighty-five years old and as strong as I was then. I can still go to war and fight. So give me the land that Moses promised. You heard my report, and you heard what he said. You were there."

13-15. Then Joshua blessed Caleb and gave him the land he asked for, because he had faith in the Lord and followed Him with his whole heart.

The land he wanted originally belonged to the giants that the people had been so afraid of, but after Caleb defeated them, the fighting stopped, and there was peace in the land.

The Land of Judah

15 The tribe of Judah was given the land south of the Dead Sea, including the city of Jebus (later called Jerusalem), the Valley of the Giants, and the area to the west toward the Mediterranean Sea.

A Wedding Present

13-17. Joshua gave Caleb the land he wanted. So Caleb went and drove out the giants who still lived there. When he got to the last city, he said, "I will give my daughter in marriage to the man who takes it." Then Othniel took the city, and Caleb gave him his daughter, as he had promised.

18. Then Othniel persuaded her to ask her father for a field with springs of water as an additional wedding gift. She agreed. So a few days later she got on a donkey and went to see her father. He greeted her and asked what he could do for her.

19. She said, "Father, please let me have the field with springs that is next to the land you already gave us. We need it to water our cattle." Caleb gave her not only that field but also another one with springs on it.

The Cities of Judah

20-63. The tribe of Judah had more than 100 cities in its territory, not counting the surrounding towns and villages. But they didn't take control of the city of Jerusalem. So those people continued to live in the land of Judah.

Ephraim and Manasseh

16 The territory of Ephraim and half the tribe of Manasseh went from the Jordan River to Jericho, up to the city of Bethel, and over to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

10. But Ephraim let some of the Canaanites work for them, and later the Canaanites led them into worshipping idols.

Manasseh's Territory

17 Now half the tribe of Manasseh had settled in the land east of the Jordan River. The other half of the tribe settled in the land of Canaan next to the tribe of Ephraim. Both these tribes were descendants of the sons of Joseph.

3-4. There was a man who had no sons, only daughters. They went to Joshua and the high priest and said, "Our father had no sons, so Moses promised to give us an inheritance along with the men from our tribe."

5-6. Then Joshua gave the five girls an equal amount of land along with Manasseh's five great-grandsons. They all settled in the land of Canaan.

7-11. To the south the territory of Manasseh bordered on the land of Ephraim, to the west on the Mediterranean Sea, and to the north beyond the city of Megiddo.

12-13. But the tribe of Manasseh did not take all the cities in their territory until they got stronger. Even then they didn't make the people leave, but let them stay and be their servants.

More Land Needed

14-15. The tribal leaders of Ephraim and Manasseh went to Joshua and said, "We're growing so fast that we need more land." Joshua said, "If you're so big, go and take the extra

land you need, especially the hill country, where some giants still live."

16-18. The leaders said, "The hill country alone isn't enough, and besides, those people have iron chariots." Sensing their lack of faith, Joshua said, "You may have the extra land, but you'll have to go and fight for it. Show your faith in the Lord and go and take it. Even if these people do have iron chariots, the Lord is on your side. He will help you."

The Rest of Canaan

18 After Joshua had taken large sections of Canaan, there was peace in the land. Then the people set up the sanctuary at Shiloh. **2-4.** There were still seven tribes that had not received land. Joshua said to them, "How long are you going to wait before you go and take the land that the Lord has given you? Pick three men from each tribe and send them through the country to map out your territories. Then let them give us a report."

5-7. "The tribe of Judah will settle here, and the tribe of Ephraim and half the tribe of Manasseh already have their territory. After the men get back, we'll draw lots to see which tribe gets what. The Levites are not included, because they're assigned to the sanctuary. And the tribes of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh are already settled."

8-9. Before the men left, Joshua said to them, "We want you to go and map out the rest of the land of Canaan and come back and give us a report. Then we'll draw lots to see who gets which land." So the men left, listed all the cities they saw, and wrote down suggestions as to how the land should be divided.

10. When they returned, Joshua lis-

tened to their report, looked at their map, and was pleased with what they had done. He drew lots in the presence of the Lord and the tribal leaders, and then gave them their territory.

Benjamin

11-28. The first lot Joshua drew was for Benjamin. It was a small territory between Judah and Ephraim. It included the mountains and valleys reaching south to the tip of the Dead Sea and east to the Jordan River. There were fourteen cities with towns and villages, including the city of Jerusalem.

Simeon

19 The next lot drawn was for Simeon. Its territory was south of Judah and included thirteen cities in one area and four cities in another area. Part of the territory came from Judah because they had more than they needed.

Zebulun

10-16. The third lot was for Zebulun. Its territory was to the north. It included twelve cities with surrounding towns and villages.

Issachar

17-23. The fourth lot was for Issachar. Its territory was south of Zebulun and north of Manasseh. It included sixteen cities with towns and villages.

Asher

24-31. The fifth lot was for Asher. Its territory was west of Zebulun and went clear over to the Mediterranean coast. It included twenty-two cities with their surrounding villages.

Naphtali

32-39. The sixth lot Joshua drew was

for Naphtali. Its territory was east and north of Zebulun and Issachar. It included nineteen cities with their surrounding towns and villages.

Dan

40-48. The last lot Joshua drew was for Dan. Its territory was south of Ephraim and ran north along the Mediterranean coast. It included seventeen cities with their surrounding villages. Later they took some land far to the north, including a city that they renamed Dan.

Joshua Settled Near Shiloh

49-50. When Joshua finished dividing the land, the people wanted him to have a big piece for himself. He thanked them but asked for only a small city in the mountains of Ephraim. It was not far from Shiloh, where the sanctuary was. The Lord agreed, and that's where Joshua settled.

51. So these are the territories given to the seven tribes by Joshua and the high priest in the presence of the Lord.

Cities of Safety

20 Then the Lord said to Joshua, "Tell the people to pick out six cities of safety. I told Moses that these cities are for anyone who accidentally kills someone to quickly go to before the dead person's relatives try to get even with him.

4-5. "A man can go there and state his case to the city officials. They should give him a place to live and not turn him over to the dead person's relatives.

6. "The city officials are to hear his case before an appointed group of people. If they agree that it was an accident, they should let the man stay in the city until the high priest dies. Then the man can leave."

7-8. To the east of the Jordan River the people picked one city in the territory of Naphtali, one in Ephraim, and one in Judah. On the other side of the river they picked one each in the territories of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh.

9. These were the cities of safety that anyone who killed someone accidentally could quickly go to. Here he would be safe and have a fair trial before the dead person's relatives found him and killed him.

The Levites

21 Then the tribe of Levi wanted to know where they should settle. They went to Joshua and Eleazar, the high priest, and reminded them that Moses had promised to give them cities with pastureland for their animals. Joshua talked to the people, and they gave the Levites the cities and pastures they needed.

4-7. The tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin gave them thirteen cities. Ephraim, Dan, and half the tribe of Manasseh gave them ten cities. Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and the other half the tribe of Manasseh gave them thirteen cities. And Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun gave them twelve cities.

8. Altogether the people gave the Levites forty-eight cities with pastureland, spread across the country as the Lord had directed.

9-40. Judah took the lead in doing this, followed by Simeon and Benjamin. Then came Ephraim, followed by Dan and half the tribe of Manasseh. The other half of the tribe of Manasseh was next, followed by Issachar, Asher, and Naphtali. The tribes of Zebulun, Reuben, and Gad gave their cities last.

41-42. This was the order of the tribes that gave the Levites forty-eight cities

with pastureland as their inheritance. **43-45.** The Lord gave the children of Israel the land of Canaan, as He had said He would. So that's where they settled. The Lord also gave them peace on all sides. No one attacked them because of the victories the Lord had given them. Of all the good things the Lord had promised to do, not one failed.

Troops Return Home

22 Then Joshua called together the men of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh and said, "You have been true to your word and have done everything that Moses asked you to do. You've been away from home a long time and have helped us take Canaan.

4-5. "Now that the tribes are settled, you are free to go back home to your families on the other side of Jordan. But be sure to keep the Commandments of the Lord that Moses gave us. Love the Lord with all your heart and soul. Hold on to Him, obey Him, and serve Him with all your might."

6-7. Then Joshua blessed them and sent them home. This included only half the tribe of Manasseh. The other half settled in Canaan.

8. Before they left he also said, "You're going home with large flocks and herds, with huge amounts of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and lots of clothing. Share these things with your brothers back home who couldn't come and fight with you. They deserve a share."

9. So the men returned home to the land that Moses had given them as their inheritance.

10-12. When they got to Gilgal on the other side of the Jordan River, they decided to build an altar to the Lord like the one at Shiloh where the sanc-

tuary was. When the other tribes heard about it, they were ready to go to war against their brothers, because this was against what God had said.

13-14. Before going to war they decided to sent Phinehas the priest and a man from each tribe to go find out what this was all about.

15-17. These men crossed the Jordan and said to the leaders of the other tribes, "How could you do such a wicked thing by building an altar just for yourselves? Have you forgotten what happened when some of our men worshiped with the Moabites, and how the Lord disciplined us?"

18. "Now you're doing something just like it by having another altar of worship besides the one at the sanctuary. We'll all be disciplined by God for what you have done.

19. "If you feel that the Lord is not with you because His sanctuary is on our side of the Jordan, then why did you settle over here? Why don't you move where we are? We'll be glad to have you. But whatever you do, don't have an altar just for yourselves and divide us.

20. "When Achan took things out of Jericho, which the Lord told us not to do, He disciplined all of us. After that, a number of our troops got killed in battle against the little city of Ai because He wasn't with us."

21-23. Then the leaders of Reuben and Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh answered, "The Lord is the only God there is, and we know it. He knows why we built this altar. So let us tell you why. If we had done it to disobey God, we would deserve to die. If we built it to offer our sacrifices on, may the Lord discipline us as He sees fit.

24-25. "But we did this because we were afraid that your descendants

wouldn't accept us as part of Israel or let us worship with you. So we built this altar as a reminder that we are one people and that the Jordan is not a border between two countries. We are one with your descendants, and we worship one and the same God.

26-27. "That's the reason we built a copy of the Lord's altar on this side of Jordan—not to have our own worship. This altar is a witness of our common faith. It is to remind our descendants that we are one people. No one can say that we are not part of Israel.

28. "If anyone ever brings up the idea of separation, we can tell them to go and look at this altar. It's exactly like the one at Shiloh, where the sanctuary is. It's not a separate place of worship.

29. "God forbid that we should rebel against Him. We love Him and want to serve Him. We plan to worship Him at the sanctuary with you. We certainly did not build this altar to say, now that we've helped you get settled in Canaan, that we'll be having nothing more to do with you."

30-31. When Phinehas and the other men heard that, they were pleased. Then Phinehas said, "Now we know that the Lord is still with us, because we are one people. We were afraid that He might have left us because of this. But you didn't build this altar for the reason we thought."

32-33. So Phinehas and the men went back home and told Joshua and the people what they had said. When the people heard it, they were glad and praised the Lord for their brothers' faithfulness.

34. Then the tribes across Jordan named the altar "The Witness" and put this inscription on it: "This altar is a witness to our common faith in the God of Israel."

Joshua's Farewell Address

23 Some years after the people had settled in Canaan, Joshua called the leaders together to talk to them one last time. He said, "I'm now very old. You have seen what the Lord has done for us. He has helped us defeat our enemies and has given us this land.

4-5. "I have given each tribe its share, but there's still lots of territory to be taken. Canaan goes all the way from the Jordan River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west. The Lord will help you take the rest of the land and will do for you what He has done in the past.

6-7. "So be courageous, and do what is written in the book that Moses gave us. Don't make friendship treaties with the Canaanite kings that are left. Don't worship their idols and don't get involved in practicing magic or spiritualism. Don't even talk about their gods.

8-11. "Hold on to the Lord and do what He asks you to do. He has helped you before, and He will do it again. No army can stand up against you. The reason that a few of you can defeat thousands is that the Lord is with you, not that you're so strong. So hold on to the Lord and love Him.

12. "If you turn away from Him and worship other gods, you'll end up making friendship treaties with these people. Then your sons and daughters will marry them, and the Lord will no longer help you.

13. "You'll end up doing what these people do and will get further away from the Lord. You'll become more and more like the Canaanites. After a while you won't know the difference between right and wrong, and the people will take back the land the Lord has given you.

14. "Now my time to die has come. But before I go, I want to remind you that not one of God's promises has failed. He did everything that He said He would and more.

15. "Everything good that He said would happen did. And everything bad that He says will happen if you worship idols, will happen too. This means that He will not stop the people from taking back the land He gave you.

16. "If you break the covenant God made with you and worship other gods, the Lord will turn away from you, and you will be driven out of this good land, which He has given you."

God's Covenant Renewed

24 Then Joshua had all the tribes come to Shechem, where the ark was, because that's where God first made His covenant with Abraham. When the people arrived, he had the leaders come up front to present themselves to the Lord.

2-3. Joshua said to the people, "The Lord has given me this message for you: Long ago your ancestors lived on the other side of the Euphrates River. But the people there worshiped idols. So I asked Abraham to leave, and he obeyed. Then I brought him to Canaan and gave him a son named Isaac.

4-5. "I gave Isaac two sons, Jacob and Esau. I gave Esau the mountains and sent Jacob to Egypt because of the famine where he lived. But the Egyptians mistreated him and his family. So I raised up Moses and Aaron to bring them out. I brought plagues on Egypt until the king let them go.

6-7. "I opened the Red Sea for them to walk across, but brought the waters together on the king and his army. You were children then, but you saw

all this. Then I led you to Sinai and talked with you from the mountain.

8-10. "I helped you defeat two powerful kings and gave you their land before you even got to Canaan. When another king asked Balaam to curse you, I caused him to bless you. Then I helped you defeat that king.

11-12. "I opened the Jordan River, and you walked across into Canaan. I gave the city of Jericho to you. I sent hornets to help you defeat the Canaanites. You didn't do this just with your swords and bows and arrows.

13. "I gave you a land you neither worked for nor paid for. I gave you cities and towns that you did not build and orchards and vineyards that you did not plant."

14. Then Joshua said, "You know all this, so be grateful for what the Lord has done for you. Love Him and serve Him with all your heart and mind and strength. Don't worship idols, as some of our ancestors did on the other side of the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Serve the Lord.

15. "If it doesn't seem good to you to serve the Lord our God, choose today which gods you will serve. Will it be the gods on the other side of the Euphrates, or the gods of the Canaanites? As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord."

16-18. The people said, "We too will serve the Lord. He is the one who brought us out of Egypt and set us free. He brought us safely through the wilderness and protected us from our enemies. He brought us into the land of Canaan, as He said He would. So we too have chosen; we and our families will serve the Lord."

19. Joshua answered, "Don't think that you're so strong that you don't need Him to help you. Hold on to Him with all you've got. If you leave Him

and worship pagan gods, the Lord can't forgive you unless you repent and turn back to Him.

20. "If you turn away from Him, He will discipline you by letting disasters come, hoping to bring you back to love Him. If you stubbornly go your own way, you can no longer be part of God's people."

21. When the people heard that, they said, "No! This will never happen, because we have made up our mind to serve the Lord."

22-24. Joshua replied, "You are your own witnesses to what you just said." The people answered, "Yes, we are." Joshua challenged, "If that is so, then get rid of the little idols some of you are still carrying around, and give your heart totally to the Lord." The people answered, "We will. And we promise to serve Him."

25-26. So Joshua made a covenant with the people and gave them laws that would help them stay close to the Lord and wrote them in a book. Then he took a large stone and set it at the foot of a large oak tree

close to the sanctuary and the ark. **27-28.** He said, "Take a good look. This stone is a witness to the covenant you just made with the Lord. This stone heard what you said and will stay here to remind you to keep your promise and not turn away from Him." Then he blessed the people and sent them home.

29-30. Not long afterward Joshua died. He was 110 years old. The people buried him on his own property in the mountains of Ephraim.

31. The people served the Lord faithfully all the days of Joshua. And they served Him all the days of the leaders who were with him who had seen all the things the Lord had done for His people.

32. And the bones of Joseph, which the people had brought out of Egypt, were buried on the property that Jacob, his father, had bought.

33. Not long after this, Eleazar, the high priest who was one of the sons of Aaron, also died. They buried him in the mountains of Ephraim where his son Phinehas lived.

Judges

INTRODUCTION: *Many believe that Samuel wrote this book. It covers about 400 years, from 1400 to 1000 B.C. Judges were leaders. There were good and bad leaders. God's people sinned again and again. God would let their enemies win, and the Israelites would turn back to God. Then He would send a leader to defeat their enemies and lead Israel to do right. We learn that God is eager to forgive if people ask Him. The important people in this book are Deborah, Gideon, and Samson.*

The Land of Canaan

1 After Joshua died, the leaders of Israel said to the Lord, "Which tribe should fight the Canaanites first?" The Lord answered, "Judah. And I will help them." Then the men of Judah said to the people of Simeon, who lived nearby, "Come and help us. And when your turn comes to fight, we'll help you."

4-7. So Judah and Simeon fought the Canaanites living in their territory and defeated them. They also captured one of their kings. They did to him what he had done to many other kings. They cut off his thumbs and big toes so that he couldn't run or hold a sword. They let him live in the city of Jebus (later called Jerusalem) until he died.

8-10. Judah and Simeon had earlier taken the city of Jebus and set parts of it on fire. They also defeated the Canaanites in the mountains, in the foothills, and in the southern plains, including the giants who had lived there.

11-13. Caleb and his men attacked the city of Debir, but could not take it. So Caleb said to his men, "Whoever breaks through the city's defenses, I will give him my daughter in marriage." Then his nephew

Othniel did just that. He and his men took the city. So Caleb's daughter married Othniel.

14-15. After the wedding Othniel persuaded her to ask her father for an additional field as a wedding gift. So she went to see her father. He asked, "What can I do for you?" She replied, "The field you gave us is dry. Would you also give us the one next to it which has springs of water?" So her father gave her two fields with springs.

16-17. During this time the descendants of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, left the city of Jericho and moved south. And the men of Judah and Simeon continued their campaign and took more Canaanite cities.

18-19. Then the men of Judah went on alone and took a number of cities on the coast and in the mountains. The Lord helped them in all that they did. Then the men of Judah decided to take the cities in the plains, also. But they could not defeat those Canaanites who had iron chariots, because Judah decided to keep the pagan idols.

20-21. Years before, Moses had promised to give the city of Hebron to Caleb, who defeated three families of giants. But the people of Benjamin

were not as successful and could not take the city of Jebus. Because they kept the pagan idols, the Lord could not help them.

22-23. When the men of Ephraim and Manasseh attacked Bethel, the Lord helped them. But before they attacked, they sent some men to spy things out.

24-26. When they saw a man come out of the city, they stopped him and said, "Tell us the best way to enter your city, and we'll spare your life." He told them, and when they took the city, they spared his life. Then he and his family moved to another place.

27-29. But there were some cities that Manasseh did not take. So the Canaanites continued to live there. Even after Israel got stronger they did not drive them out but made them work for them. The tribe of Ephraim did the same thing.

30-32. The tribe of Zebulun followed the example of Ephraim, and so did the tribe of Asher. The only difference was that Asher could not make the Canaanites work for them, because there were too many of them.

33. The tribe of Naphtali couldn't take some of the cities in their territory, because there were too many Canaanites. But they did take a few cities and were able to make some of the people there work for them.

34-36. The men from the tribe of Dan tried to take the cities in the plains, but the Amorites drove them back into the hills. But Ephraim and Manasseh defeated some of them and made them work for them. The territory of the Amorites was big. It went all the way south beyond the Dead Sea.

Israel Disobeys

2 It was the Angel of the Lord, the Son of God, who led the children of Israel out of Egypt. He appeared to the tribal leaders and said, "I brought you out of Egypt and gave you the land of Canaan, as I promised your ancestors.

2-3. "I made an agreement with you. You were not to make peace treaties with the Canaanites. You were not to keep their idols but to destroy them. But you didn't do it. That's why I couldn't always help you as I wanted to. The Canaanites will be like thorns in your sides. You will see what they're doing and will want to do the same things."

4-6. When the leaders heard that, they cried. That's why the place is called "The Place of Weeping." The leaders repented of their sins, committed themselves to the Lord, and offered sacrifices to Him. Then Joshua, who was still living, sent the leaders back to their tribes and told them to obey.

7-9. So the leaders served the Lord as long as Joshua and the older men who had been first to come into Canaan were still alive. Joshua was 110 years old when he died. He was buried in the mountains of Ephraim, where he had lived.

10-13. After the older men also died, there came a younger generation who forgot all about the kindness of the Lord and what He had done for Israel. They began to worship Baal and do all kinds of bad things. It wasn't long before they turned away from the Lord altogether. They began worshipping many of the gods of the people, including a mother goddess. They thought these gods would give them bigger crops.

14-15. So the Lord had to remove His protection from them. Their enemies attacked their villages, took their pos-

sessions, and destroyed their cities. Israel could not defeat them, because the Lord did not help them. The people of Israel really suffered.

16-17. Occasionally the Lord would raise up leaders who championed His cause. He wanted the people to know that He still loved them. But the people continued to worship idols and would not listen to the leaders that the Lord gave them.

18-19. Sometimes the Lord would raise up a leader (called a judge), and the people would listen. Then the Lord would help them. But when the judge died, the people would go back to worshiping idols. Each generation would become more stubborn, no matter what the Lord did to get their attention.

20-22. The Lord was not happy and said, "Because My people insist on having their own way and refuse to keep the agreement I made with them, I can't help them. I will leave the Canaanites in the land to see if My people will obey Me, as they did when Joshua was alive."

23. So that's what the Lord did. But the people didn't learn, nor did they have faith in the Lord. So He did not help them or give them the victories He wanted to.

God Tests Their Faith

3 The Lord decided to test the faith of the new generation. He let them have a taste of war to see if they would appreciate the peace and prosperity He had given them before.

3-6. Five Philistine rulers were left in the land, plus Canaanite groups living north and south throughout the country. Israel was always being tempted to do what these other people did. In this way their love for the

Lord was really tested. But they not only continued to worship idols, they even married Canaanites.

7-8. Israel continued to do evil and forgot all about the Lord. They loved to worship male and female gods, especially Baal. The Lord was really hurt over what they were doing to themselves. So He let their enemies occupy parts of their land for eight years.

9-11. When the Israelites cried to the Lord for help, He heard their prayers and raised up Othniel to free His people. The Holy Spirit helped him to raise up an army and drive out Canaanites from that part of the country. So for the next forty years Israel had peace, until Othniel died.

12-14. Then it happened again. The people started doing what they had done before. So the Lord let other enemies come into the land and occupy part of Israel. This lasted for eighteen years.

15-17. The Israelites cried to the Lord for help. He heard their prayers and raised up Ehud to be their leader. The people asked him to take their tax money to the enemy king personally. Before he left he strapped a short sword to his upper leg under his robe. Then he and his men left.

18-19. After delivering the tax money, he sent his men back home ahead of him. But he turned around and went back to give the king a message. They took him in to see the king, and Ehud said, "I have a personal message for you." So the king sent all his servants out of the room. Now the king was a big man and very fat.

20-23. As he stood up, Ehud said, "This is the message." Then he stepped forward and bowed to the king to reach under his robe for his short sword. The king thought he was reaching for the message. But Ehud

took his sword and stabbed the king in the stomach. It got stuck, so he left it there. Then he left, locked the door, and escaped.

24-25. A little later the king's servants went to his private room and found the door locked. They said, "Maybe he's going to the bathroom." So they waited. Finally, they unlocked the door and found the king lying on the floor dead.

26-30. By this time Ehud had left the city. When he got to Ephraim, he blew the ram's horn and called his men to battle. Then he said, "Follow me!" They crossed the Jordan River and attacked the Moabites. They killed thousands of enemy troops and drove the rest out of the country. Then that part of Israel had peace for the next twenty years.

31. After Ehud died, Shamgar took over and personally killed hundreds of Philistines and freed another part of Israel.

A Prophetess

4 After Ehud and Shamgar died, it happened again. Israel started worshiping idols and doing evil things. So the Lord let a Canaanite king occupy another part of Israel. The officer in charge was Sisera. He had 900 iron chariots under his command. He was very cruel to God's people. He ruled over that part of Israel for twenty years. Then the people cried to the Lord for help.

4-5. At this time Deborah, the prophetess, was guiding Israel. She lived in Ephraim, where she would see people who came to her for advice.

6-7. One day Deborah sent for a man named Barak. She said to him, "The Lord said for me to tell you, 'Call together the men from Naphtali and Zebulun at Mount Tabor. I will see to

it that Sisera takes his chariots down the dry riverbed to attack you. Then I will help you defeat him.'"

8-9. Barak answered Deborah, "I'll do it if you'll go with me. But if you don't go, I won't go either." Deborah said, "All right, I'll go. But because of your lack of faith in what the Lord has said, a woman will get the credit for killing Sisera, not you."

10. Then Barak called together the men from Zebulun and Naphtali, and they met him at Mount Tabor. Deborah was there too.

11. Now a man from Judah had moved north and settled in Naphtali near some other descendants of Moses. He pitched his tent under a giant oak tree not far from where Barak lived.

12-13. Sisera heard that thousands of men had come to Mount Tabor to fight. So he took his entire army and his 900 chariots and headed down the dry riverbed to meet the Israelites and defeat them.

14-16. Then Deborah said to Barak: "Go! The Lord will give you the victory." So Barak took his men and attacked, and the Lord helped him. Soon Sisera's army was defeated and in full retreat. When Sisera saw that the battle was lost, he left his chariot and fled on foot. Barak went after the fleeing troops and killed every one of them.

17-18. Sisera escaped and headed north until he got to the giant oak where the man from Judah had pitched his tent. The man's wife greeted him and said, "Come in and rest awhile. You don't have to be afraid." So he accepted her invitation and went inside.

19-20. He found a corner in the tent and sat down exhausted. Then he asked her for a drink of water, and she gave him a drink of milk. This

made him feel as if he could trust her. So he said, "If anyone comes looking for me, tell them that I'm not here." She also gave him a blanket and invited him to rest awhile. So he lay down and went to sleep.

21. First she made sure that Sisera was sound asleep on his side. Then she took a tent stake and a hammer. With one quick blow she drove the tent stake through the side of his head and into the ground. And that's how the enemy king's general died.

22. A little later Barak came by looking for Sisera. She was glad to see him and said, "Come, let me show you the man you're looking for." Barak went inside; she pulled back the blanket, and there was Sisera, nailed with his head to the ground.

23-24. So the Lord gave the Israelites the victory. And Barak and his men went after the king and destroyed him and the rest of his army. Then this part of Israel was free from their enemies and had peace.

The Victory Song

5 That day Deborah and Barak sang this victory song: "Praise the Lord for saving Israel! The people followed God's leading and were ready to fight.

3-5. "Listen, kings and rulers. We are singing to the Lord. Our music is for the God of Israel. The Lord goes before us, as He did when He brought us out of Egypt. He shook Mount Sinai and sent rain from heaven. He shook Mount Tabor and sent the rain to make the river flow against our enemies!

6-7. "Our highways were empty. Merchants no longer came through our land. Our villages were quiet. Our people were oppressed and robbed. Then the Lord gave us Deborah, the prophetess, who was like a mother to Israel.

8-11. "War came to the land because Israel had gone after other gods. Cities were attacked, and there was fighting in the streets. Israel had few spears or shields. They had no weapons of war. People are praising the Lord for Barak and his men. They are praising the Lord for their courage and faith.

12-14. "Deborah put a new song in our hearts. Barak led our armies to victory. The faithful ones gathered around him and were ready for war. Men of courage came from Ephraim and Benjamin. Captains came from Manasseh and generals from Zebulun. The leaders in Issachar listened to Deborah, and their men rallied around Barak.

15-17. "But the leaders of Reuben couldn't make up their minds. They sat around their campfires and talked about it, but did nothing. The tribe of Gad stayed on the other side of Jordan. Dan went sailing, and Asher enjoyed life on the beach.

18. "The men of Zebulun and Naphtali were ready to give their lives to set Israel free.

19-21. "The kings of Canaan came to Sisera's aid, but all were defeated. That ended their raids into Israel. Nature itself was against them. The Lord sent rain from heaven and made the Kishon River flow, which swept them all away. March on, O men of Israel!

22-23. "Our enemies came on horses. Their hooves shook the ground. The Angel of the Lord will not bless those who live in the path of the fleeing enemy and did nothing to help defeat them.

24-27. "Blessed be the wife of Heber, the most courageous among women. Sisera asked for water, and she gave him milk. She was not afraid. She used a hammer and a tent stake to nail him to the ground while he slept.

He struggled to get up, but couldn't. He died at her feet.

28-30. "At home his mother waited for him. She looked for his chariot. She wondered why his horses were so slow. Her friends reassured her. She said to herself, 'He'll be coming soon. He has found more villages to plunder. He and his men found some girls who attracted them. He has found some dresses for me fit for a queen.'

31. "Lord, may all Your enemies perish. But may those who love You shine as the sun." So there was peace in Israel for the next forty years.

Gideon

6 Again the people forgot what the Lord had done for them. They turned from Him and did evil things. So the Lord let the Midianites terrorize parts of Israel for seven years. They were so cruel that many Israelites went to live in caves or hid in the mountains.

3-4. When the people planted crops, the Midianites and their friends would come, destroy the crops, and kill all the sheep and cattle they could find.

5-7. There were so many Midianites that it was impossible to count them. They would come and ruin the countryside from one end to the other. Israel was totally helpless. So they cried to the Lord, and He heard their prayers and answered them.

8-10. Through a prophet the Lord told them, "I brought you out of the land of Egypt and gave you victory over your enemies. I gave you the land of Canaan as your inheritance. I told you not to worship idols, but you didn't listen."

11. Early in the morning the Angel of the Lord took on the form of a man and sat under an oak tree. Gideon was

nearby threshing grain, trying to hide from the Midianites.

12-14. The Angel of the Lord said, "Gideon, God is with you. You're a brave man." Gideon was startled. He turned and asked, "If God is with us, then why has He let the Midianites do all this to us?" The Angel of the Lord said, "I want to use you to save Israel from their enemies."

15-18. Gideon answered, "But how can I save Israel? My family is small. No one listens to us. I'm even the youngest son." The Angel of the Lord replied, "I'll go with you and help you. You will defeat the Midianites." Gideon asked, "Are you an angel? Please give me a sign. Wait here until I get an offering." The Angel of the Lord said, "I'll wait until you come back."

19-20. Gideon went and got a baby goat, slaughtered it, and cooked its meat. He also took flour and baked some bread. He made some broth, put everything in a basket, and went back to the tree. The Angel of God stood up and said, "Lay the meat and the bread on this rock and pour the broth over them." So Gideon did.

21-22. The Angel of the Lord touched the meat and the bread with the stick in his hand. Fire shot out of the rock and burned up the meat and the bread. Then He disappeared. When Gideon saw this, he knew it was the Lord. He fell on his knees and said, "O Lord, I have seen You face to face and am still alive! How can this be?"

23-24. The Lord said to Gideon, "I am still here; you just can't see Me. Don't be afraid. You won't die." Then Gideon built a small stone altar to the Lord and called it "The Altar of Peace." It stood there for years.

25-26. That night the Lord spoke to Gideon again and said, "Take one of your father's bulls, destroy the idol

they call Baal, and build a large altar out of natural stone. Then use the wood from the idol to make a fire and offer the bull as a sacrifice to Me."

27-28. That night Gideon took ten farmhands and did exactly what the Lord had told him to do. He was afraid to do it during the day because the people might stop him. The next morning the people noticed a new altar and that a bull had been offered on it.

29-30. They asked, "Who did this?" On checking, they found that Gideon had done it. So they went to his father and demanded, "Your son needs to die for what he did. He destroyed our wooden idol of Baal and the wooden idol of our goddess."

31-32. The father believed that the Lord had spoken to Gideon, so he said, "Why must you defend a god? Can't Baal take care of himself? If he can't, he's not a real god. Those who defend him are the ones who should die." Then Gideon was called "The Man Who Challenged Baal."

33-35. In the meantime the Midianites and their friends crossed the Jordan River and camped in the valley, ready to make another raid into Israel. Then the Holy Spirit came on Gideon. He blew the ram's horn to call the men of the area to battle. He also sent messengers to the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali to come and help.

36-37. Gideon still had some doubts. So he said, "Lord, how can I fight these well-armed Midianites? I can't save Israel. I need to know if You'll go with me. Tonight I'll put a piece of wool outside. If in the morning it's wet and the ground is dry, then I'll take it as a sign that You will go with me."

38. The next morning Gideon went outside and noticed that the ground

was dry, but the piece of wool was wet. When he squeezed the wool, the water filled a small bowl.

39-40. As he thought about this, he decided that it wasn't a good test, because wool absorbs moisture. So he said, "Lord, don't be angry with me. Let me ask for one more sign. This time let the ground be wet and the wool dry." And that's what happened. The ground was wet with heavy dew, and the wool was totally dry.

Gideon's Army

7Early the next morning Gideon and his men pitched camp south of the Midianites. The Lord said, "You have too many men. If I give you the victory now, people will think you did it. Tell your men that anyone who is afraid and thinks the Midianites will win should go home." Then thousands of men went home.

4-5. The Lord said, "You still have too many men. Take them down to the brook, and I'll tell you which ones should stay." When they got to the brook, the Lord said, "Watch how they drink. Some will scoop up the water in their hands, all the time watching for the enemy. Others will get on their knees and drink as a dog would."

6-8. About 300 men drank using their hands. All the rest got on their knees to drink. The Lord said, "Keep the 300 and send the rest home." Thousands more left, but they did leave their food supplies and rams' horns. Then he took the men who were left and climbed the hill overlooking the Midianite camp.

9-11. That night the Lord awakened Gideon and said, "Get up. I want you to attack the Midianite army. I'll help you. If you're afraid to do it with so few men, then take your servant and get as close to their camp as you can.

Listen to what their men are saying. What you hear will give you courage." So that's what Gideon did.

12. The Midianites and their allies filled the entire valley. They had so many camels, you couldn't count them.

13. Gideon and his servant crept right up against one of their tents. They heard one man say to his friend, "Wake up! I just had the strangest dream. I saw a huge loaf of bread come rolling down the mountain right into our camp. It hit our tent with such force that it knocked the tent down, and it fell on our heads."

14. His friend said, "This can mean only one thing. Gideon and his men will come rushing down the mountain and overrun our camp. God will give our whole army into his hand."

15. When Gideon and his servant heard that, they bowed to the ground and worshiped the Lord. Then they went back to camp. Gideon awakened his men and said, "Get up. The Lord wants us to attack the Midianites now."

16-18. Then Gideon divided his men into three groups of 100 each. He gave each man a ram's horn, a smoldering torch, and a clay jar to cover it up. He said, "We'll quietly make our way to the Midianite camp and surround it on three sides. When you hear my ram's horn, then blow yours and shout, 'The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!'"

19-20. They quietly made their way close to the enemy camp. It was almost midnight. Then Gideon and his 100 men blew their rams' horns, uncovered their torches, and waved them in the air until they burst into flames. The other groups of men did the same thing. They all shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!"

21-22. When the Midianites heard the shout, they panicked. They thought Gideon's men were inside the camp.

In the confusion they began to kill each other. Many of them ran back to the border.

23-24. Men from Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh came to help Gideon. He also asked the men from Ephraim to help. They came as fast as they could and stopped the Midianites before they could cross the Jordan River.

25. They captured a large number of Midianite troops, including two generals called Oreb and Zeeb, also known as Raven and Wolf. They executed them and sent their heads to Gideon, who had already crossed the river.

Gideon Saves Israel

8 Then the men from Ephraim said to Gideon, "Why didn't you ask us to help you from the beginning? You wanted the credit for winning the battle, didn't you?" Gideon answered, "No, I didn't. Actually, you did more than I did. The last part of the battle is more important than the first part. You captured the two generals. I didn't." That made the men of Ephraim feel better.

4-6. Gideon's men were exhausted, but they went after the escaping Midianites anyway. At one place they stopped and asked the people for something to eat, but the city fathers refused. They said, "You haven't captured the two Midianite kings yet. If you don't, they'll come back and punish us."

7. Gideon said, "After what you saw the Lord do for us, you still doubt the outcome? We'll go on, and when we come back, I'll have you whipped for this."

8-9. So Gideon and his men pushed on to the next town, and the same thing happened there. Gideon said, "After we capture the two kings, we'll come back and tear down your fortifications that you trust in so much."

10-12. The two kings and their men thought they were safe. Fewer than ten percent of their army had survived. Gideon caught up with them and attacked. The two kings tried to get away, but Gideon's men caught them. The few Midianites that were left panicked and scattered in all directions.

13. The Lord had given Gideon and his men extra strength that day, but now they were totally exhausted. After they had eaten and rested, they returned with the two kings.

14-16. On the way back, Gideon came upon a young man and asked him how many officials were in charge of the town. He answered, "Seventy-seven." When Gideon got to the town, he showed the people the two kings and ordered the city fathers whipped.

17. He also stopped at the other town and tore down their fortifications, as he had promised. When the men resisted, he had all of them killed.

18-19. Then Gideon asked the two kings, "When you invaded Israel by Mount Tabor, what did the men there look like?" They answered, "They looked like you. Everyone we killed looked like a prince." Gideon said, "Those were my brothers. If you had not killed them, I would not kill you."

20-21. So he told his son to take his sword and kill the two captured kings. But the boy hesitated because he was still very young. Then the kings said, "That is a man's job. Why don't you do it yourself?" So Gideon did. After taking the gold ornaments off their camels, he gave all the animals to the city fathers.

Gideon's Mistake

22-24. When Gideon got home, his men said to him, "You saved us from the Midianites, so we want you to be our ruler." Gideon said, "I will not. The

Lord is our ruler. But you could do me a favor: let me have the gold earrings you took from the dead Midianites."

25-26. They answered, "We'll be glad to." The golden earrings weighed more than forty pounds. The men also gave Gideon gold chains, as well as gold ornaments that they had taken from the camels' necks.

27. Gideon thanked his men and sent them home. Then he made a high priestly vest and breastpiece, decorated it with gold, and hung it up outside to remind people what the Lord had done for them. He also built an altar to the Lord. But he didn't ask God about it. And before long, people were worshiping the vest and breastpiece.

28. But Israel was free from the Midianites and had peace for the next forty years.

29-32. Gideon stayed in his hometown. Over the years he had a number of wives and many sons, including one named Abimelech. After a long life, Gideon died, and they buried him next to his father.

33-35. No sooner had Gideon died than the children of Israel went back to worshiping Baal. They even agreed to worship with the Canaanites as a sign of peace. They forgot all about what the Lord had done for them, and what Gideon and his family had done to save Israel from the Midianites.

Abimelech's Bad Behavior

9 One day Gideon's son, Abimelech, decided to visit his mother's Canaanite relatives. They lived in the town of Shechem. He said to them, "Ask the people whether they want Gideon's other sons or me to govern the country." His uncles went and asked the city fathers, and they decided for Abimelech.

4-5. To help him, they gave him money,

which he used to hire seventy mean bodyguards. He took them back with him to his hometown. He then asked his brothers to join him in worshipping the Lord at the altar that their father had built. When they came, he told his bodyguards to kill them, which they did. But the youngest brother, Jotham, escaped.

6. Then Abimelech went back to his mother's hometown, and the city fathers made him king.

7-13. During the celebration Jotham climbed a nearby hill, called to the people, and said, "Listen to me. One day the trees decided to choose a king for themselves. They asked the olive tree. But it refused. It would rather produce olives. The same thing happened when they asked the fig tree and the grapevine.

14-16. "Then the trees asked a thornbush. It agreed and said, 'Now that I'm king, you need to listen to me. If you don't, I will start a fire and burn all of you up.' Abimelech is like this thornbush. You'll be sorry for making him your king.

17-21. "Have you forgotten what my father, Gideon, did for you? He risked his life to free you from the Midianites. Today you've insulted him by honoring Abimelech just because he's your relative. If what you did is right, may you be happy. If not, may fire destroy your city." Then Jotham ran and went to live in another part of the country.

22-25. Abimelech had his capital in another city. Three years later he and the people who had made him king were not getting along. They were sorry for having made him king. Some of the men decided to rob all the travelers that came that way, so as to hurt Abimelech's reputation. This really upset him, and he decided to go after these men.

26-29. Then a man named Gaal and his brothers moved to town. The people decided that he should be their king. So Gaal gave a big party and said, "Why listen to Abimelech? Who does he think he is? One of my ancestors was a king. I'm ready to take on his whole army."

30-33. Now Zebul, Abimelech's officer, heard all this. So he sent a message to Abimelech telling him what had happened. He suggested that Abimelech attack the city and that when Gaal came out to fight, he would be sure to get him.

34-36. So Abimelech took his men and hid them in the fields around the city. Early that morning Gaal spotted Abimelech's men. He said to Zebul, who was conducting the city's business, "Those look like Abimelech's men." Zebul said, "You're seeing things."

37-41. Gaal said, "Look! They're coming at us from everywhere!" Zebul said, "Sure enough! This is your chance. Take your men and go fight." So that's what Gaal did. But Abimelech defeated them. Then he went back home, and Zebul and his men drove Gaal and his brothers out of the city.

42-45. The next day, when the people went out to harvest grapes, Abimelech came back and attacked the people. He killed as many as he could and then attacked the city. He finally took the city, killed everyone in it, and then set it on fire.

46-49. Some of the people and their families escaped and went up the hill to hide in one of the temples of Baal. But Abimelech took his men, chopped down some trees, and used them to burn down the idol's temple with the people inside.

50-54. Then Abimelech attacked one of the nearby cities because it had joined the rebellion. He captured it,

but some of the people ran and hid in the city's defense tower. So he decided to burn it to the ground. As he came close to the tower to light the fire, a woman dropped a huge stone on his head, and he died.

55-57. When Abimelech's men saw that he was dead, they left him lying there and went home. God let this happen to punish him for all the bad things he had done. Jotham's story of the trees choosing a king came true.

Israel Is Bad Again

10 After Abimelech died, the Lord raised up a man called Tola to help Israel. He lived in the hill country of Ephraim and governed Israel for twenty-three years. When he died, he was buried in his hometown.

3-5. After Tola came Jair, who governed Israel for twenty-two years. He had many sons who helped him. When he died, he was buried in the mountains where he had lived.

6-7. Again the children of Israel did evil. This time they not only worshiped Baal and Ashtaroth, the mother goddess, but also many other gods. Soon they forgot the Lord and stopped serving Him altogether. God was not happy with what they were doing, so He let their enemies invade the country.

8-9. For eighteen years they oppressed the children of Israel. They made them pay high taxes, and when the people resisted, they crushed them. They also raided Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim, and treated the people with cruelty.

10-14. Then the people cried to the Lord for help. They confessed their sins and promised to turn away from Baal and their other gods. The Lord listened and said, "Haven't I helped you many times before? But every time you turn away from Me and go

back to your idols. So this time I will not help you. Go to Baal and your other gods, and let them help you."

15-16. The people said, "We have sinned, and we deserve to face the consequences. But please deliver us one more time before our enemies wipe us out." The people put away their idols and gave their hearts to the Lord. The Lord felt sorry for them and decided to help them.

17-18. The next time their enemies came and set up camp to raid their country and collect taxes, the Israelites also set up camp. But they needed a leader with courage to fight.

New Leadership

11 A man named Jephthah had been rejected by his brothers. They told him to go and live somewhere else. So he left home and went to live in another town. Soon he became the town's leader, in charge of a little band of soldiers.

4-8. When Israel was attacked by the Ammonites, the elders asked Jephthah to help them. He said, "To please my brothers, you told me to leave home. Why come to me now?" The elders replied, "We not only want you to be our military leader; we also want you to govern Israel."

9-11. Jephthah asked, "How do I know that you'll keep your promise?" The elders said, "We have taken an oath to God that we will keep our word." So Jephthah agreed to help them, and he became their military leader and governor. He promised the Lord that he would go to war to defend Israel.

12-13. He sent a message to the Ammonite king, asking, "Why do you keep making raids into Israel?" The king answered, "When the children of Israel came out of Egypt, they took our land, and we want it back."

14-19. Jephthah sent a message back saying, "That's not true. When Israel came out of Egypt, they crossed the Red Sea and made their way through the wilderness. They asked the king of Edom, the king of Moab, and the king of the Amorites to let them pass peacefully through their land, but they refused.

20-24. "Then the king of the Amorites called out his troops and attacked Israel. That's why God told them to fight back, and He helped them defeat the king. That's when they took over that land. So what right do the Ammonites have to it? Wouldn't you hold on to the land that your god gave you? It's the same with us.

25-26. "What about the king of Moab? He was a lot stronger than you are. But his people never did what you're doing to us. For the past 300 years we have had this land. During all that time your people never claimed it was theirs until now.

27-28. "What have we done to you that you treat us this way? Our people are suffering terribly because of you. What you are doing is not right. Let God be the judge whose land this is." But the king refused to listen.

29. Then God's Spirit came upon Jephthah, and he called for troops throughout Israel. But only the tribes of Gad and Manasseh responded. He organized them into companies and then marched against the Ammonites. **30-33.** He also made a vow and said, "Lord, if You help us win, when I get back home I will give You as a burnt offering whatever comes running to welcome me." Then he attacked, and the Lord gave him the victory. This ended the raids into Israel, and once again there was peace in the land.

34. When Jephthah got home, his daughter ran out to welcome him. She

played the tambourine and danced and sang, she was so happy to see him home. She was the only child he had.

35. When he saw her so happy, it broke his heart. He tore his robe in grief and said, "Oh, no! Not my daughter!" Then he told her about the promise he made to the Lord and the oath he had taken.

36-37. His daughter said, "Don't worry, Father. I'll gladly stay single for the rest of my life as a living offering to God because He gave you the victory over the Ammonites and Israel is free again. Just let me have two months to visit my girlfriends to tell them what happened. We'll cry together because I'll never have children to help build Israel."

38-39. Jephthah agreed. So she visited her friends who went with her on a two-month retreat in the mountains. They prayed and wept together. Then she came home and worked for the Lord as a single person for the rest of her life.

40. This started the custom of young women meeting together for four days each a year to honor Jephthah's daughter.

Civil War

12 When the men from Ephraim heard about Jephthah's victory, they called up their troops and marched to see him. They demanded, "Why didn't you give us a chance to fight alongside of you? Speak up, or we'll burn your house down."

2-3. Jephthah answered, "We had a big problem. The Ammonites kept raiding this part of Israel, and our people were really suffering. I asked all the tribes to come and help, but only Gad and Manasseh responded. I don't know of one man from Ephraim who came. I risked my life to free Israel,

and the Lord helped me. Why are you so upset?"

4. Then war broke out between Jephthah and the men from Ephraim. Jephthah's men were very angry because the men of Ephraim had insulted them.

5. Jephthah's men defeated the men from Ephraim and took over the crossings of the Jordan River so that the men from Ephraim couldn't get back home. Jephthah's men would stop those who wanted to cross and ask them if they were from Ephraim or not.

6. If a man said, "No," they would give him one of their words to pronounce. If he couldn't pronounce it right, they knew he was lying, and they would kill him. By the time the fighting was over, thousands of men from Ephraim had been killed. Then there was peace in Israel.

7. Jephthah governed Israel for six years. When he died, they buried him in his own hometown.

Other Governors

8-10. After Jephthah died, Ibzan became governor. He had a big family, and his sons and daughters married people from other tribes, which helped bring Israel together. He governed Israel for only seven years before he died.

11-15. After that, Elon governed Israel for ten years. Then Abdon governed Israel for eight years. He had a big family and was very wealthy. He bought special donkeys for each of his children to ride on. When he died, they buried him in the mountains of Ephraim.

Samson

13 The children of Israel turned away from the Lord again. So the Lord removed His protec-

tion and let the Philistines oppress them for forty years.

2-3. Now, there was a man living in the territory of Dan whose name was Manoah. He and his wife had no children. One day the Angel of the Lord appeared to her and said, "I know you have no children, but soon you will have a son.

4-5. "Don't drink alcohol or anything like it and don't eat unclean food, because it will affect your son before he is born. Don't cut his hair or let him shave. He is not to drink alcohol or eat any grapes or unclean foods. He is not to touch a dead body. I have chosen him to deliver Israel from the Philistines."

6-7. She went to her husband and said, "A man appeared to me. He looked awesome, like the Angel of the Lord they tell us about. I didn't ask him where he came from, and he didn't give me his name. He told me that I would have a baby boy, and that I should not drink alcohol or eat unclean foods, because the baby will be special."

8-9. Then Manoah asked God to let the same man come back again to tell them how to raise the boy. God heard his prayer, and the Angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah's wife again while she was in the field.

10-11. She hurried home to get her husband and said, "The man who appeared to me the first time is back. Come and talk to him." Manoah ran out to the field with his wife and asked, "Are you the man who talked to my wife?" He answered, "Yes, I am."

12-14. Manoah said, "How should we raise our son? What can you tell us?" The Angel of the Lord said, "Your wife should do all the things I've told her. She should not drink alcohol or anything related to it and should not eat

unclean foods. And the boy should be taught to do the same thing."

15-16. Manoah pleaded, "Don't go away. Stay here until we get a little goat and make you something to eat." The Angel answered, "I'll stay, but I won't eat. Get the young goat, but offer it as a sacrifice." Manoah didn't really know to whom he was talking.

17-18. He asked, "What is your name? We want to tell people who it was who told us we would have a baby." The Angel said, "Why is it so important for you to know My name? It's a name too wonderful for you to fully understand."

19. Manoah brought the young goat and some grain and offered them both as a sacrifice on a nearby rock. What happened next was amazing.

20-21. Flames from the Angel of the Lord set the offering on fire. The flames shot up to the sky, and He went up to heaven in the fire. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they fell on their knees and bowed their heads to the ground.

22-23. Manoah said to his wife, "I think we're going to die, because the Lord Himself talked to us." His wife replied, "If that happened, how could we have a baby and raise it for the Lord? If God wanted to kill us, why would He accept our offering and tell us what to do?"

24-25. Not long afterward Manoah's wife had a baby boy. They named him Samson. As he grew, the Lord was with him and blessed him. One day he went to a city occupied by the Philistines and saw how cruel they were to his people. That is when the Holy Spirit began to prepare him to free his people.

Samson Gets Married

14 When Samson was grown, he went to visit the city of Timnah. While there he met a beautiful young woman and fell in

love with her. So he went back home and told his parents that he wanted to marry her.

3-4. His parents said, "Aren't there beautiful girls in Israel? Why would you want to marry a Philistine girl?" But Samson wouldn't listen. He said, "I love her, and I'm going to marry her. So please make the wedding arrangements." He would not change his mind. So God decided to use the situation to confront the Philistines.

5-6. Then his parents got ready to go to Timnah to make the necessary arrangements. Samson went ahead of them, sure that the girl would agree to marry him. As he passed a vineyard, a young lion came out and attacked him. God's Spirit came on him, and he tore the lion apart as easily as he would a baby goat.

7. Then he went on his way. When he got to Timnah, he proposed to the young woman, and she accepted.

8-9. The next time Samson returned, he again passed by the vineyard where he had killed the young lion. He saw a bees' nest in its skeleton. He scooped out some honey and ate it. It tasted good. So he took some home and gave it to his parents. But he didn't tell them where he had gotten it.

10-11. It was the custom that the parents of the groom would provide a weeklong wedding feast. So Samson's father went ahead and made the arrangements. When Samson and his Hebrew friends got there, they found thirty young Philistines who had been sent to keep an eye on them.

12-14. As was also the custom, the young men asked riddles. Samson challenged them and said, "If you can solve my riddle, I'll give each of you a beautiful robe." The Philistines agreed. Samson said, "Out of the

eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet." Three days later they still couldn't solve the riddle.

15. On the fourth day they said to the bride, "We must solve Samson's riddle. We want you to find out what it is. If you don't, we'll set your parents' house on fire with you in it. We don't want to look like fools. Besides, we want those robes he promised us."

16-17. So the bride went to Samson and said, "If you loved me, you would tell me the answer to the riddle." He said, "I haven't even told my parents." For the rest of the week she cried often and said that he didn't love her. On the last day he gave in and told her. Then she told the young men.

18. Just as the wedding feast was ending, they said to Samson, "We have the answer. What is sweeter to eat than honey? Who is stronger than a lion?" Samson said, "If you had not pressured my bride, you would never have solved the riddle."

19. Samson then visited a Philistine city about twenty-five miles away. Thirty young men challenged him to a fight, and he ended up killing them all. He took everything they had. Then he went back and gave their robes to the thirty young Philistines in Timnah. But he was angry over what they had done to get the answer to his riddle. So he turned around and went home.

20. The Philistines thought that he had gone home for good. So the father of the bride gave her to the leader of the thirty, who had been Samson's best man at the wedding.

he got there, he gave her father the present and said, "I'm sorry I got mad and left. But I would like to take my young wife home with me. Is she here?"

2. The father said, "I'm sorry. I thought you had gone for good. So I gave her to the leader of the group of young men, and she married him. Her younger sister is still single, and she's even more beautiful. Why don't you marry her?"

3-5. Samson said, "This time I'm going to get even with you Philistines for all the tricks you've pulled on me." So he went out and caught 300 foxes, tied them together in pairs by their tails. Then he tied a burning torch to the middle of the long rope and let them go. As they ran, they set fire to wheat fields and vineyards and even olive groves.

6-8. When the Philistine leaders found out who had done it and why, they went to Samson's in-laws, tied up the family, and set their house on fire with them in it. When Samson heard that, he sent the leaders this message: "If that's the kind of people you are, I'll get even with you." Then he attacked the Philistines and killed many of them. After that he went home and hid in a cave.

9-10. So the Philistines marched into Judah and surrounded the area where Samson was. The people of Israel asked, "Why are you invading this part of our land? What have we done?" They answered, "We're not here to start a war. All we want is Samson because of what he has done to us."

11. The men of Judah said, "Let us get him for you." So they took 3,000 men and went to the cave where Samson was. They said, "Don't you know that the Philistines control our country? Look what you've done." Samson answered, "I only paid them back for what they did to me."

Samson and the Philistines

15 A little later Samson decided to go back to Timnah to see his young wife and to give her father a baby goat as a present. When

12-13. They replied, "We've come to turn you over to the Philistines so that they'll leave us alone." Samson said, "I'll let you tie me up, but don't you attack me." They answered, "We won't." So Samson came out of the cave, and they tied him up to turn him over to the Philistines.

14-17. When the Philistines saw him, they let out a war cry and headed straight for him. Then the power of the Holy Spirit came on Samson. He broke the ropes, picked up a jawbone from a donkey's skeleton, and killed 1,000 men. When it was over, he said, "I won and made donkeys of them all." From then on the people called the place "Jawbone Hill."

18-19. Samson was exhausted and very thirsty. He prayed, "Lord, You have helped me win, but now I'm dying of thirst. Please don't let the Philistines find me." The Lord filled a low spot in the rocks with water from a spring. Samson drank from it and felt better. The people called the spring "The Spring of Prayer."

20. The children of Israel didn't take advantage of Samson's victory and drive the Philistines out of their country, as they should have. So the Philistines were even more cruel to them than before. This went on for twenty years. During all this time Samson was the country's governor.

Samson's Mistake

16 Samson went back and forth from Judah to the Philistine territory, and no one challenged him. One day he went to the city of Gaza, where he met a woman, and they became friends. He spent the night with her.

2. When the men of the city heard that Samson was in town, some of them quietly surrounded her house, waiting

for Samson to come out. Others waited at the city gates for him. They decided they'd wait all night if they had to. They planned to jump him and kill him when he came out.

3. About midnight Samson decided to go home. When he got to the city gates and found them locked, he took hold of them, pulled both gates out of the ground, and carried them to the top of a nearby hill. When the men saw this, they were amazed and too afraid to do anything.

4-5. Later Samson fell in love with a woman named Delilah, who lived in the valley. The five leaders of the Philistines made an agreement with her. They said, "Find out what makes Samson so strong so that we can capture him. We promise we won't hurt him. If you do that for us, each of us will give you more than 1,000 pieces of silver."

6-8. Delilah agreed. She said to Samson, "Tell me what makes you so strong." He said, "If someone tied me up with seven new bowstrings, I would be no stronger than anyone else." She told the Philistines what he had said, and they gave her seven new bowstrings. The next time Samson came, she waited until he was asleep and then tied his hands together with the new bowstrings.

9. The Philistines were hiding in the house. Delilah shouted, "Samson! The Philistines are here!" Samson woke up and broke the seven bowstrings as if they were being burned with fire. When the Philistines saw this, they turned and ran.

10-11. But Samson didn't learn his lesson. He went back to Delilah again. She pouted and said, "Last time you lied to me. If you really loved me, you'd tell me the truth." He answered, "I'm sorry. The truth is that if you tied

me up with brand-new ropes, I would be just like everyone else."

12. She told the Philistines, and they gave her some brand-new ropes. When Samson came again, she waited until he was sound asleep and tied his hands together. Delilah then shouted, "Samson! The Philistines are here!" Samson woke up and snapped the ropes as if they were strings. When the Philistines saw this, they turned and ran.

13. Samson still didn't learn his lesson. The next time he came, Delilah said, "You lied to me a second time. How can you say that you love me and then lie to me?" Samson said, "If you tie the ends of my long hair to that new piece of cloth you're sewing, I'll be just like everyone else."

14. So when he was asleep, that's what she did. Then Delilah shouted, "Samson! The Philistines are here!" Samson woke up, and with the end of his long hair tied to the cloth, he pulled the whole weaving machine with him as he went after the Philistines. When they saw this, they turned and ran.

15. Even though Delilah had tricked Samson, he went back to see her again. She said, "You've lied to me three times. You keep telling me you love me, but I don't believe you anymore. The only way I'll trust you is if you tell me the real truth."

16-17. Day after day she kept after Samson until he couldn't take it anymore. So he said, "God wants me to do a special work for Him. As a sign, I must never cut my hair. If I do, I'll be no stronger than anyone else."

18. Delilah talked to the Philistines and said, "Come back just one more time and bring the reward money with you. I believe that what Samson said this time is really true." So they agreed to come with the money.

19. The next time Samson came,

Delilah had him lay his head on her lap, and she stroked his hair until he fell asleep. Then she had a man come in to cut off the seven long braids of hair, and Samson lost his strength.

20. Delilah shouted, "Samson! The Philistines are here!" Samson woke up and said to himself, "This time I'm going to teach them a lesson." He didn't know that his strength was gone. But the Philistines could tell that he wasn't the same.

21. So they jumped on him, tied him up, and put out his eyes. Then they put chains on his ankles and wrists and made him push a beam attached to a big millstone which ground grain.

22. Samson was sorry for what he had done. He confessed his sins and gave his heart to the Lord more fully. God forgave him, and as his hair grew, his strength came back too.

Samson Dies

23-24. When the Philistines held the next festival came to honor their god, they decided to show off Samson as a trophy of victory. They said, "Let's honor our god, who helped us capture Samson." The people said, "Yes, let's praise our god, who gave us the man who burned down our fields."

25. Someone shouted, "Bring Samson into the temple stadium so that we can make fun of him." And that's what they did. This lasted a long time. Then they took him to one side where the temple pillars were.

26-27. Samson was very tired. He said to the boy guiding him, "Let me feel the pillars so that I can lean against them and rest awhile." That's what the boy did. The stadium could hold about 3,000 people, and it was full that day. Some very important people were there, including all the Philistine leaders.

28. Samson prayed, "Lord, I believe You've forgiven me. Now, please give me back my full strength just one more time. I want everyone to know that the Philistine god is not real, and that it's not right for them to treat me the way they do."

29-30. Samson believed that the Lord heard his prayer. So he shouted, "Let me die!" Then he pushed with all his might. The pillars gave way, and the whole temple stadium collapsed. Everyone died, including Samson.

31. Then his brothers came, dug his body out of the rubble, took him home, and buried him next to his father.

The Miniature Sanctuary

17 Now, there was a man in one part of Israel named Micah. One day he said to his mother, "I heard you curse the man who stole your silver coins. I have to admit that I'm the one who took them. Here they are."

3. His mother said, "Bless you, my son, for being honest. Now that I have them back, I'll give half of the money to the Lord. Here, take it and make a small image to thank the Lord for giving me such an honest son."

4-5. But Micah refused. He said, "It's better if you do it. So she took the money and had a small image made and gave it to Micah. He took it home and decided to build a miniature sanctuary in his house. Then he asked one of his sons to serve as priest. He even made some high priestly clothes for him to wear.

6. In those days there was no government in Israel, so everyone did what he thought was right. And that's what Micah did.

7-9. About this time a young Levite passed through town, stopped at Micah's house, and asked if he could

stay overnight. Micah welcomed him. When the Levite saw the miniature sanctuary, he was very interested. Micah asked, "Where are you from?" The young man said, "I'm a Levite looking for work because the tithe is low."

10-12. Micah said, "Stay and work for me. You can be our family priest. I'll pay you well and give you a place to stay and food and clothes." The young Levite agreed. So Micah made him the family priest instead of his son and treated him well.

13. Micah said to himself, "Now that I have a Levite in the house, I know that the Lord will bless me." But everything he did was what the Lord had told the people not to do.

The Men From Dan

18 During this time Israel had no king or government. Local judges did their best to govern the country and solve its problems. One day some of the people of Dan decided to move to the mountains. So they sent five men to find some empty land in Ephraim. When they came to Micah's house, he invited them to stay overnight.

3-6. While there they noticed the miniature sanctuary. When they saw the young Levite, they said, "We've met before. What are you doing here?" After he told them, they said, "Ask the Lord if we'll find some land in Ephraim on which to settle." The young Levite prayed and then said, "Yes, you'll find it. The Lord is with you."

7-10. So the five men left and headed north, where they found a city full of peaceful, happy people. Then they went back home and said, "We found a city full of peaceful people. We can easily take it and make it our own. The farmland is good, and it's easy to grow crops. The place has every-

thing that we could wish for. So let's go and take it."

11-15. So 600 men from the tribe of Dan headed north. On the way they stopped in Judah and then in Ephraim, where Micah lived. The five men told the others about the miniature sanctuary in his house and about the young Levite. They responded, "Let's go take a look." When they got to the house, the young Levite came out to welcome them.

16-20. While the men talked with him, the five men went into the house and took the silver image and the priestly garments. When they came out, the Levite said, "What are you doing?" They said, "Be quiet. You're coming with us to be our priest. It's better for you to serve a tribe than a family." The Levite liked the idea and agreed to go.

21-23. When Micah came home, he noticed that the silver image and the priestly garments were gone. So he called together the men from the neighborhood, and they went after the men from Dan. When they caught up with them, the men from Dan said, "What's the matter? Why are you armed?"

24-26. Micah said, "You took my silver image and my young Levite. How can you say 'What's the matter?'" The men from Dan answered, "Don't start an argument, or we'll kill all of you and go back and kill your family, too." Micah saw that they meant it. So he took his men and went back home.

27-29. The men from Dan went on their way north, attacked the peaceful people, and set their city on fire. Other cities couldn't help the people, because they were too far away. Then the men from Dan rebuilt the city and named it Dan, after one of the sons of Jacob.

30-31. Then they set up the silver image, and the Levite served as their

priest for many years. The Levite's name was Jonathan. He was a descendant of Moses. The Danites decided to keep the silver image of the Lord, because the real sanctuary was too far away.

Wickedness in Israel

19 In those days there was no government or king to keep order and guide the people. A Levite who lived in Ephraim married his servant girl. She was from Bethlehem in Judah. One day they had a big argument, and he wasn't very nice to her. So she went home to her parents.

3-4. Later he decided to apologize and to ask her to come back home with him. So he took a servant and a couple of donkeys and went to see her. Her father welcomed him, and the Levite and his wife made up.

5-9. A couple of days later they decided to start back home. After breakfast her father asked them to stay an extra day, which they did. The next day, the same thing happened. On the third day the father again asked them to stay, but they decided to leave, even though it was late. The father said, "That's not a good idea."

10-14. But the Levite wouldn't change his mind, so they said goodbye and left. They headed for the city of Jerusalem with the idea of staying overnight there. But the trip took longer than they thought, so they stopped in the town of Gibeah, in the territory of Benjamin.

15-19. They sat in the city square and waited for someone to invite them home. (That's what the people did back then.) Finally, just as it got dark an old farmer coming home from the field saw them and asked, "Where are you folks from?" They answered,

"Ephraim. We were visiting in Bethlehem and are on our way home. We need a place to stay."

20-21. The man said, "Come and stay with me. You don't want to spend the night in the city square." So they went to his house, fed their donkeys, and had something to eat.

22-24. No sooner had they finished eating than they heard a knock on the door. When the farmer opened the door, the men outside said, "We're having a party tonight and want your visitor to come and join us." The old man said, "He's my guest and he's very tired. I know what your parties are like. Don't be mean."

25-26. But the men wouldn't listen. So the Levite pulled the old man away from the door and had his wife go with them. The men took her and went their way. They were mean to her at the party and hurt her badly. She finally made it back to the house and collapsed at the front door.

27-28. At daybreak the Levite hurried out to look for his wife. When he opened the door and saw her lying there, he tried to wake her up, but she was dead. So he put her body across his donkey and went home.

29-30. He was very angry to think that men could be so mean. So he sent evidence of his wife's death to each of the twelve tribes to let them know what had happened. When they saw the evidence, they too became angry. They said, "How can this be? This is the same cruelty we experienced in Egypt. We need to do something about this!"

War In Israel

20 Then men from all over Israel got together at Mizpah, not far from Gibeah, to ask the Lord what to do. Thousands of men came, and they were all armed.

3. When the men in Benjamin heard about it, they sent some men to find out what the meeting was all about. Then the tribal leaders asked the Levite to come and tell what had happened so everyone could hear it.

4-5. The Levite said, "My wife and I were on our way home from Bethlehem and stopped overnight in Gibeah, where the Benjamites live. An old farmer invited us to stay with him. When we had finished eating, some men came and invited me to a party. When I refused to go, they took my wife and abused her until she died.

6-7. "That's why I sent a small piece of her body to you—to let you know the cruelty of these men. What are you going to do about it?"

8-9. All the leaders agreed that they would not go home until this thing was settled. So they drew lots to see which troops would go to Gibeah and ask the city fathers to turn over those involved. If they refused, the tribes would declare war and attack the city.

10-11. The leaders also drew lots to select who would be responsible for the food. This gave the rest of the troops time to get ready in case of war. But they all agreed for the delegation of men to talk to the city fathers first, to see what they would say.

12-14. Before this they had sent messengers throughout the tribe of Benjamin to let the people know what was going on. They said, "Such an awful thing should not happen in Israel. These men need to be tried for murder." But the leaders and the people in Benjamin refused to listen. So the other tribes called up their troops and got ready for war.

15-17. The Benjamites had thousands of troops and hundreds of marksmen who could sling a stone with their left hand and not miss a hair. They could

slung it with such force that it would go through a shield and a helmet. But men from the rest of the tribes were good fighters too.

18. Then the tribal leaders asked the Lord which tribe should go first to fight their brothers. The Lord answered, "The tribe of Judah."

19-21. So the men from Judah marched up to the city of Gibeah and pitched camp. The next day they got ready to attack. But the men from Benjamin attacked first. The men from Judah lost, and thousands were killed.

22-25. The next day the tribes came back with fresh troops. They asked the Lord if they should go against Benjamin again. The Lord said, "Yes." But the same thing happened. The men from Benjamin attacked first, and the men from the other tribes lost. Thousands were killed.

26-28. The leaders cried and asked the Lord what to do. They fasted and prayed and offered sacrifices to the Lord at Shiloh, where the ark was. Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, served there as high priest. The Lord said to the leaders, "Attack the Benjamites, and this time I'll go with you."

29-32. So they went back with fresh troops and surrounded the city. They got ready to attack, but the men from Benjamin attacked first. This time the Israelites ran, and the Benjamites went after them. The Israelites did this on purpose to get them as far from the city as possible.

33-35. Then the rest of the Israelites, who had surrounded the city, came out of hiding. They attacked the Benjamites who had stayed to defend the city. Although the Benjamites fought hard, they lost, and many of them were killed.

36-37. The Benjamites in the city admitted defeat and surrendered. The

Israelites took the city and set it on fire. **38-40.** When the main Israelite force saw the smoke, they stopped running and turned around to attack the pursuing Benjamites. These men, too, saw the smoke and knew that their troops guarding the city had been defeated.

41-47. Then the Israelites attacked, and the men from Benjamin ran. But other Israelites attacked them from the rear, and they were caught in the middle. Many Benjamites were killed. The few left ran to hide in nearby caves. About 600 made it there.

48. The Israelites killed thousands of Benjamites. They destroyed many villages and set them on fire, as they had the city.

Helping the Benjamites

21 When the war was over, the Israelites took an oath never to let their daughters marry someone from the tribe of Benjamin.

2-3. Then the tribal leaders went to Shiloh, where the ark was, and cried over everything that had happened. They fasted and prayed and said to the Lord, "Why did all this have to happen? One of our tribes is now almost wiped out."

4-5. The next morning they built a stone altar and offered sacrifices to the Lord. Then they said, "Was there a tribe that didn't come to help us in this?" But men from all the tribes were there.

6-7. They all cried over Benjamin and said, "We have lost almost one whole tribe. So few people are left that foreigners could come in and take over. We have to think about something we can do to help them. But we took an oath not to let our daughters marry any of them. What can we do?"

8-9. They discussed the problem and decided to count again. All the tribes except the city of Jabesh Gilead had

sent men. They couldn't believe it. So they counted again, and it was true.

10-11. So they sent some of their bravest troops to the city to punish them for not helping to fight the Benjamites, saying, "If the people fight you, do to their city what you did to the city of Benjamin."

12. And that's what happened. The only ones left alive were 400 young women, which the men brought back with them.

13-15. Then the leaders sent a message to the men in the caves. They offered to make peace with them, and the men agreed. Four hundred of the men from the caves married these young women, but there were not enough women for everyone.

16-19. So the leaders said, "Now what do we do? We're 200 young women short. We can't break the oath we took, even if it was a bad one. Here's an idea. In a few days there will be a festival at Shiloh, and lots of young women will come."

20-21. So they said to the 200 men from Benjamin, "If you still need a wife, why don't you go up to Shiloh? When the festival begins, the young women will come out of the city. Take the one you like and see if she will marry you."

22. "If the parents object, we'll explain the problem. We'll also tell them that we're not breaking our oath, because you came and took the young women. We didn't give them to you. They'll understand."

23-24. So that's what the men did. When the young women came out of the city for the festival, each man took the woman he liked, and if she agreed, he married her. Then they went back to Jabesh Gilead and began rebuilding the city. The tribal leaders were also happy, and they too went home.

25. That's how things were done in those days, because there was no government or king to guide the people. Everyone did what he thought was right.

Ruth

INTRODUCTION: *Some think that this book also was written by Samuel. It tells about a young Moabite widow named Ruth who follows her Jewish mother-in-law back to Israel. There Ruth met a man who loved God, and she agreed to marry him. This happened during the time of the judges. Boaz and Ruth had a son named Obed, who became the grandfather of David.*

Naomi and Ruth

1 Before Israel had a king, judges kept law and order. It was during this time that a drought hit the country, and people had little to eat. So a man from Bethlehem, his wife, Naomi, and their two sons moved to the neighboring country of Moab.

3-5. Not long after they had moved, the husband got sick and died. Even though the drought had ended back home, Naomi decided to stay in Moab. Her two sons married local girls, Orpah and Ruth. About ten years later these men got sick and died. So Naomi and her two daughters-in-law were alone and without support.

6-9. Naomi decided to go back home. Orpah and Ruth started out with her. On the way, Naomi urged them to stay in their own country. She prayed with them and then said, "May the Lord be as kind to you as He has been to me. May He give each of you a husband and a family." Then she kissed them and said goodbye.

10-13. The young women cried and said, "We want to go with you." Naomi answered, "Why would you want to go with me? In my country you'd be foreigners. You're better off here. Besides, I have no more sons for you to marry. It's hard to say

goodbye. But you're still young. I am old and all alone."

14-15. They all cried. Then Orpah decided to go back home. She kissed Naomi and said goodbye. But not Ruth. Naomi said to her, "You need to go back too, where people know you. Don't come with me. You'll be in a country with different customs, and everyone will know that you're a foreigner."

16-18. Ruth said, "Don't ask me to leave you. I want to go where you go and live where you live. Your people will be my people and your God, my God. May the Lord punish me if anything but death separates me from you." When Naomi saw how determined Ruth was, she let her come.

19-21. When the two got to Bethlehem, the whole town was excited. The women said, "Naomi is back home!" She answered, "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara, because life has been very hard on me. I left here with a husband and two sons. But now all three have died. And I am all alone."

22. So Naomi was finally back home, and Ruth was with her. It was the time of year when crops were being harvested.

Ruth Goes to Work

2 Naomi had a relative whose name was Boaz. He was well respected and owned a large farm. One day Ruth said, "Let me go out to the fields and pick what the harvesters have left for the poor." Naomi replied, "That's a good idea. We're almost out of food." So Ruth went out to one of the fields, which happened to belong to Boaz.

4-5. Later that day Boaz went to see how the harvesters were doing. He said to them, "God bless all of you for doing a good job." They said, "God bless you, too, Boaz." Then he asked who the young woman who was picking up the harvest leftovers was.

6-7. The foreman said, "Her name is Ruth. She's Naomi's daughter-in-law from the country of Moab. She came early this morning and has been working all day long. Once in a while she came under our canopy to get out of the sun. But that's all."

8-9. Then Boaz called Ruth over and said, "Young lady, let me give you some advice. This is a big field. Don't end up in some corner by yourself. Stay close to my servant girls. I've told my men not to hurt you just because you're a foreigner. When you get thirsty, get a drink from our water supply."

10-12. Ruth bowed and said, "Thank you for being kind to me. But why should you be so kind to a foreigner?" Boaz said, "They told me you're Naomi's daughter-in-law and how willing you were to come with her to look after her. May the Lord repay you for your kindness. May our God, whom you love, bless you in all you do."

13. Ruth said, "Sir, you have talked to me as gently as if I were one of your servants. I feel safe here. Thank you."

14. At mealtime Boaz called to Ruth, "Come and join us. Get out of the sun

and have something to eat." Ruth came and sat down and ate until she was satisfied. What was left she saved for Naomi.

15-16. After she went back to work, Boaz said to his men, "If she gets too close to what's been harvested, don't scold her. And when she gets near where you're harvesting, let some extra drop for her."

17-18. So Ruth worked all day. Then she beat out the kernels from the stalks and had enough to fill a twenty-five-pound sack. She carried it home, and Naomi couldn't believe it. Ruth also gave her the food that she had saved from the lunch that Boaz had given her.

19. Naomi thanked her and asked, "Whose field did you say you worked in? Whoever it was, he was certainly kind to you. May the Lord bless him for it." Then Ruth said, "His name was Boaz."

20-22. Naomi replied, "Boaz? Why, he's our distant relative! Bless him for being kind to us. Surely the Lord guided you to his field." Ruth said, "He also told me to keep coming back until the harvest is done." Naomi said, "The Lord is watching over us. Keep going back, but stay close to the servant girls, as he told you."

23. So the next day Ruth went back and stayed close to the servant girls, as she had been told. She also worked the other fields that Boaz had, until the whole harvest was finished. All this time she continued to live with Naomi.

Boaz and Ruth

3 One day Naomi said to Ruth, "I need to find a husband for you. You're still young enough to have a family of your own. Boaz isn't married, and he's a distant relative of

ours, so he has first choice. This evening the men will be threshing out the harvest. So listen to me. Here's what I want you to do to thank Boaz for his kindness.

3. "Late this afternoon when you come back from the field, bathe, put on your best clothes, and go to where they're doing the threshing. But don't let Boaz see you. When the men finish their work, they'll sit down to eat and then go to sleep.

4-5. "Watch where Boaz goes. After he's asleep, go quietly over to where he is, lift up the bottom corner of the blanket, and lie by his feet. During the night his feet will touch you, and he'll wake up. When he sees you, he'll know that I sent you. That's our custom." Ruth answered, "If you say so."

6-7. After work she got ready and went to the threshing place. She watched the men eat and then lie down to sleep. She saw Boaz go to the other side of the big pile of grain and lie down. After he fell asleep, she quietly went over, picked up the corner of the blanket, and lay down at his feet.

8-9. During the night Boaz stretched, and his feet touched something. He woke up, and so did Ruth. He whispered, "What are you doing here?" She answered, "Naomi said that this is the way to let you know that I'm a widow, eligible to marry. Since you're a distant relative, you need to know first."

10-11. Boaz reached for his robe and put it over Ruth's shoulders and said, "The Lord bless you. You love Naomi and have cared for her ever since you came. You could have stayed in your own country and gotten married there. Don't worry; what you have done is our custom. Besides, people know what a good young woman you are.

12-13. "But there is a closer relative

who's not married. In the morning I'll check with him to see if he knows you. If he doesn't want to marry you, I'll be happy to be your husband. Then I'll take care of you and Naomi. Here's an extra blanket. Cover up and get some sleep."

14-15. Then Ruth lay down and prayed. Before dawn she got up to leave. Boaz whispered, "Don't tell anyone you were here. Now, let's put some grain in your shawl as a gift to Naomi." Then he tied it up and put it on her shoulder.

16-18. When she got home, Naomi was already up. She helped Ruth with the bundle and said, "Tell me what happened." Ruth told her everything. "By the way," she said, "this grain is a gift from him to you." Naomi replied, "Praise the Lord. This means that Boaz will not rest until he sees that other relative today."

Boaz Marries Ruth

4 That morning Boaz went to the town gate, where the city fathers met to do the town's business. When he saw the other relative coming, he called him over and said, "I need to talk to you." Then he asked the city fathers to witness what was being discussed.

3-4. He said to the other relative, "Naomi has come back home and put her property up for sale. Since you're a closer relative than I am, you have first choice to buy it. If you want it, the city fathers can legalize the sale. If not, I would like to buy it." The man said, "I'll buy it."

5-6. Boaz replied, "You should know that Naomi is selling on the condition that whoever buys her property must marry her daughter-in-law." The man said, "Forget it. That means I wouldn't really own the property. If I married

Ruth and we had a son, it would belong to him and his family. If you want to buy it, go ahead."

7-10. In those days, when men bought and sold property, one would give his sandal to the other to make it legal. So the man gave his sandal to Boaz in the presence of the city fathers. Boaz took it and said, "Today I am buying Naomi's property and promise to take care of her. I will also marry Ruth." Then he gave the sandal back.

11-12. The city fathers and the people who had stopped to watch said to Boaz, "We have witnessed it. The property is now yours. May the Lord bless you and Ruth and give you many children."

13-15. So Boaz bought the property

and married Ruth. The Lord blessed them, and their first baby was a boy. The neighbors said to Naomi, "Praise the Lord! He has given you a grandson. Now your family line will not die out, and you'll be well taken care of. Ruth loves you, and she herself is worth seven grandsons."

16-17. Naomi took the baby in her arms and loved it as if it were her own. The neighbors suggested they name the baby Obed, which they did. He grew up and became the father of Jesse, who became the father of David.

18-22. So the family line started with Judah, the son of Jacob, and goes all the way down to Boaz, Obed, Jesse, and David.

1 Samuel

INTRODUCTION: *This book was written largely by Samuel. It covers the last 100 years of the judges, or leaders, of Israel, from 1100 to 1000 B.C. Samuel was the last leader before Saul became its first king. Saul reigned from about 1050 to 1010 B.C. We learn that God wants His people and their leaders to obey Him. Also, we learn how the shepherd boy David killed the giant Goliath and then joined Saul's army. But Saul disobeyed God and was later killed in battle. So the people asked David to be their king.*

Hannah and Eli

1 Elkanah, from the tribe of Ephraim, had two wives. One had children, and the other didn't. Once a year he went with his family to Shiloh to worship at the sanctuary, where Eli was the high priest.

4-5. When it was Elkanah's turn to help the priests, he gladly did it. And when it came time for his family to eat the special meal, he gave twice as much to Hannah, who had no children, because he loved her very much.

6-7. But Elkanah's other wife made fun of Hannah. She believed that God loved her more, because she had children and Hannah didn't. This went on year after year. One time it got so bad that Hannah couldn't eat, and she burst into tears.

8. Her husband tried to make her feel better, saying, "Don't cry, Hanna. Eat something, and don't be so sad. You know I love you. Isn't that better than many children?"

9-10. But Hannah decided to go to the sanctuary to pray. Eli, the high priest, was sitting by the entrance talking to people. Nearby, Hannah fell on her knees and cried. She told the Lord how the other woman was making fun of her, and that she just couldn't take it anymore.

11. She prayed, "Dear Lord, please help me. Please let me have a baby. And let it be a boy. If You do, I'll carefully train him and give him back to serve You forever."

12-14. When Eli saw Hannah kneeling on the ground shaking, crying, and talking to herself, he thought she was drunk. So he went over and scolded her and said, "Are you trying to attract attention to yourself? Go home and sleep it off."

15-16. Hannah got up off her knees and said, "Sir, I haven't been drinking. I'm hurting terribly inside. I'm not the kind of woman who drinks. I'm just pouring out my heart to the Lord in prayer. I have lots of troubles."

17-18. At first Eli didn't know what to say. Then he apologized and said, "I'm sorry. Go in peace, and may the God of Israel answer your prayer." Hannah smiled through her tears and said, "I hope you will think kindly of me and remember me in your prayers." Then she felt better and went back to her husband. Now she could eat without crying.

Little Samuel

19-20. The next morning after worship, the family went back home. The Lord answered Hannah's prayer, and

she became pregnant and had a baby boy. She called him Samuel.

21-22. The next year when her husband took thanksgiving sacrifices to the Lord for giving Hannah a son, she decided to stay at home. She said to her husband, "Once little Samuel is big enough, I'll go with you again. That's when I'll introduce him to Eli to see if he would like a little boy helper. If he does and if Samuel agrees, then he can stay and help."

23. Hannah's husband agreed and said, "Take care of the little guy, and once he can take care of himself, we'll go and introduce him to Eli. I hope it will all work out like you want so you can keep your promise to the Lord."

24. About five years later Hannah decided to go with her husband and take Samuel with them. She also took some thanksgiving offerings to give to the Lord for answering her prayer.

25-27. When they got there, she took little Samuel to Eli and said, "Sir, I'm the woman who prayed for a baby. Remember? You said that you would pray for me and that the Lord would answer my prayer. Well, He did. He gave me this son. His name is Samuel."

28. "I promised the Lord that I would train him and give him back to serve the Lord forever. So if you need a helper, he's willing to stay." Eli was deeply moved. He bowed his head, and they prayed together.

Hannah's Prayer

2 Hannah prayed, "Lord, my heart is full of joy. My strength and happiness come from You. I can laugh again because You have given me a baby. Those who made fun of me are now quiet.

2-3. "No one is holy like you. There is no other God. You are our Rock. No one should brag about himself,

because You know all about us. What counts with You are actions, not just words.

4-5. "The Lord gives strength to the weak. Those who were hungry are satisfied. The wife who had no children now has many. But the wife who had many is sad because she can't have any more.

6-8. "Lord, You are the source of life. You give and take away. You humble people and make them great. You lift up the poor and treat them as princes. The earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

9-10. "Lord, You watch over Your people and guide them. You take the wicked away, and they will be no more. Those who fight against You will be destroyed. You will thunder against the wicked from heaven. You will judge the whole world. You will give power to our Messiah King and exalt the One You anointed. Amen."

11. So Hannah left little Samuel with Eli, the high priest, to help him at the sanctuary.

The Wicked Sons of Eli

12-14. Eli had two sons who did not respect God. Their father had never disciplined them. They were not satisfied with their pay, so they would force people to give them a larger part of their offerings than they were supposed to get. They even had their servants get it for them. That's how they treated everybody.

15-17. They did this to the people even before they had a chance to worship. If the people refused, the servants would say, "Our master wants a larger share of your offering now. If you don't let us have it, we'll take it." This was not what the Lord wanted priests to do, and the people said so. But Eli's sons just laughed about it.

Little Samuel

18-20. Samuel was a good, obedient child. He did all he could to help Eli. He was dressed like a little priest, and every year his mother would come and bring him a new and larger robe. Eli would bless her and say, "May the Lord give you many children." And after Hannah's husband finished his duties, they would go home.

21. As the years went by, Hannah had three more boys and two girls. But Samuel stayed with Eli, who was training him to be a priest. And as he was growing up, he refused to follow the example of Eli's two sons.

A Prophecy

22. People kept telling Eli what his wicked sons were doing, but he didn't want to cross them and make them mad. So they just became more and more wicked. They even forced the women who came to worship to sleep with them. Finally, when Eli was about ninety years old, he spoke up.

23-25. He said to his sons, "Everywhere I go, people tell me how bad you are. I keep praying that you'll come to your senses. If someone sins against someone else and then makes things right, he can be forgiven. But if he sins against God, no one can forgive him except God." But his sons didn't listen. So God had to step in to change things.

26. But the people liked young Samuel, and he began to restore their confidence in the priesthood.

27-28. About this time, a prophet came to Eli and said, "This is what the Lord says: 'Wasn't Aaron your ancestor? And wasn't he a slave in Egypt? Yet I called him to be a priest to work at My sanctuary. And I gave him and his family part of the offerings, more than enough to live on.

29. "Why are your sons so greedy? Aren't these offerings Mine? So they're stealing from Me, and you haven't done a thing about it. How long are you going to honor your sons above Me?"

30-32. "I promised that your family would always serve at My sanctuary. But your sons have ignored the conditions. I will not honor those who are living in sin and creating disrespect for the priesthood, no matter who their ancestors are. I will cut your family off from being priests, and no one in your family will ever live as long as you have.

33-34. "Some of your descendants will die by the sword, and those who are not cut off will grieve bitterly over what has happened. Both your sons will be killed on the same day. This will be a sign to you that what I said will happen to your descendants is true.

35-36. "I will raise up a faithful young man to serve Me as high priest. He will also be a prophet and govern Israel for Me. He will listen and do what is in My heart. I will bless him and his family, and his sons will serve Me as priests. Those left in your family will come to him begging for a job just to get something to eat."

The Lord Talks to Samuel

3 During the days when Samuel was a boy helping Eli, there were few prophets. Eli was very old and almost blind.

3-4. One night just before morning, when the lamps of the sanctuary were beginning to burn low, the Lord called Samuel by name. The boy said, "I'm here. I'm coming."

5-6. So he got up and ran to Eli, saying, "Did you call me?" Eli answered, "No, son. Go back to bed." So Samuel went back to bed. Again the Lord

called Samuel by name. The boy got up, ran to Eli, and said, "I'm here. Do you need me?" Eli replied, "No, son. I didn't call you. Go back to bed."

7-8. God had not spoken directly to Samuel before, so the boy didn't recognize His voice. A third time the Lord called Samuel by name. Again he got up, ran to Eli, and said, "I'm here. I heard you call me." Then Eli realized that the Lord had been calling the boy.

9-10. So he said to Samuel, "I believe the Lord is calling you. Go lie down, and when He calls again, say, 'Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went back to bed. This time the Lord came close to Samuel and quietly called him by name. The boy answered, "Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening."

11-12. The Lord said, "I'm about to do something strange in Israel. Everyone who hears about it will be shocked. I will do everything against Eli and his family that I told him I would."

13-14. "Because of his sons I will no longer back his priesthood. They have dishonored the ministry and almost destroyed people's faith in Me. Eli knew what his sons were doing, but he did not put them out of the ministry. So no amount of sacrifices or tears will change My mind. He and his family will have to face the consequences."

15. After Samuel heard all this, he was afraid. So he stayed in bed until it was time to get up and open the sanctuary.

16-18. Soon Eli called, "Samuel, my son." The boy answered, "I'm coming." When he came, Eli said, "Tell me, what did the Lord say to you? God will not be happy if you don't tell me." So young Samuel told Eli everything. Then Eli said, "The Lord is good. He will do what is best for Israel."

19. The Lord continued to bless Samuel

as he grew. Everything God had said about Eli and his family came true.

20-21. As time went on, the people knew that Samuel was called to be the next high priest as well as a prophet. So they listened to him. The Lord continued to speak to Samuel through visions and dreams. That's how the word of the Lord came to Israel during those days.

The Philistines and Israel

4 About this time Israel decided to attack the Philistines, who had gathered for war. But they didn't ask the Lord to help them. After a long hard battle the Israelites were defeated, and 4,000 of their troops were killed.

3-4. The rest of the men said, "Why did the Lord let this happen?" They talked about it and decided that if they took the ark with them into battle, they would win. That's what had happened before in their history. So they sent some men to Shiloh to get the ark and bring it into the camp. The two sons of Eli decided to come along.

5-6. When the troops saw the ark, they shouted for joy. The Philistines heard them and said, "Listen! What does that noise mean?" When they learned that the Israelites had brought the ark into camp to help them, they were afraid.

7-9. They said, "We're done for! What are we going to do? We know what their God did to the Egyptians. We need to fight as we've never fought before. Let's go and show the Hebrews the kind of men we are!"

10-11. Then they attacked the Israelites, fought hard, and killed thousands. The rest scattered and went back home. The two sons of Eli were killed, and the ark was captured.

12-13. Late that afternoon a young

man ran back to Shiloh, arriving late in the afternoon. Eli was sitting by the entrance of the sanctuary waiting for news from the front. He was worried not only about his sons but also about the ark. The young man ran past him and told the people what had happened. When they heard the shocking news, they cried out in pain.

14-17. When Eli heard it, he said to someone, "What's that wailing all about?" Then the young man told Eli, who was now ninety-eight years old and nearly blind, the bad news. He told him that Israel had been defeated and that thousands of troops had been killed. Then Eli asked about his sons and the ark.

18. When the young man told him that his two sons had been killed and that the ark had been taken, Eli collapsed, fell over backward, and died. He had served Israel as high priest for forty years.

19-22. The wife of one of Eli's sons was about to have a baby. When she heard that her husband had been killed, the ark had been taken, and her father-in-law had just died, it was too much for her. The baby was born, but the mother died. With her last words she named the baby Ichabod, meaning "God's Glory Is Gone From Israel."

The Ark and the Idol

5 After the Philistines had captured the ark, they took it home as a trophy of victory. They put it in the temple of their idol. The next morning when the leaders and priests went to the temple to worship, their huge idol lay facedown in front of the ark. So they picked it up and put it back in place.

4-5. The next morning, not only had the huge idol fallen facedown in front

of the ark again, but this time its head and hands were broken off and lying in the doorway. So they put the ark in a building by itself.

6-7. But the ark was not the blessing that the Philistines had thought it would be. The Lord caused their men to break out with tumors. Then they remembered what God had done to the Egyptians, and decided to get rid of the ark.

8-10. The five city kings got together and decided to move the ark to one of the other cities. But the same thing happened there. Then they decided to move it to still another city, but people wouldn't let them leave it there.

11-12. The people told the five kings to send the ark back to Israel. Their men too had developed tumors, and many of them had died. The people didn't want it anymore. They prayed to their idols for healing, but that didn't help.

The Ark Returned

6 The ark was with the Philistines for seven months before they decided to send it back to Israel. They asked their priests how they should send it back. The priests said, "We need to send it back with an offering. If the tumors go away, then we'll know that we were being punished for taking the ark away from the Hebrews in the first place."

4-5. The people asked the priests what kind of offering they should send with the ark. The priests answered, "Gifts of gold shaped like the tumors and the rats that have overrun our gardens and fields. Let's make five of each, representing our five major cities. This will be our sin offering and hopefully will stop the tumors and rats."

6-8. "Let's not be stubborn, as the

Egyptians were, and make fools of ourselves. The God of the Hebrews didn't stop the plagues until the king let His people go. Put the ark on a new cart, hitch two mother cows to it, but take their calves away. Then put the five gold tumors and rats in a box beside the ark on the cart, and let's see what happens.

9. "If the cows don't struggle to stay home with their calves but pull the cart straight to Israel, then we'll know that the God of the Hebrews caused our troubles. But if the cows fight to get free and run back to their calves, then we'll know that our troubles happened by chance."

10-12. The people did everything that the priests said, and the cows pulled the cart with the ark and gold offerings straight back to Israel. The five kings followed the ark to the border and watched to see if the cows would go all the way or not. They did.

13. When the people of Israel who were harvesting heard the mooing of cows, they looked up and saw the ark being pulled toward them on a new cart. They stopped harvesting and ran to meet it.

14-15. The cows pulled the cart into the field and stopped by a big rock. The people ran and got some Levites, who took the ark off the cart, chopped up the wood, and sacrificed the cows as a thank-you offering to God. Then they set the ark on the rock, and the people came and brought more offerings to the Lord.

16-18. When the five kings at the border saw this, they knew that they had made the right decision. By the time they got home, the men's tumors and the rats in the gardens and fields were gone. And the big rock where the cows had stopped was treated with great respect for years to come.

19-20. Now some of the men in Israel became curious and looked inside the ark, even though they knew they shouldn't. When they did, the Lord punished them, and they died. The people said, "We need to get rid of the ark before more of us die. What should we do?"

21. So they decided to send a message to a city in the mountains of Ephraim and ask the people there to come and get it. And that's what the people did.

Samuel Governs Israel

7 The people in the mountains loved the Lord and were glad to have the ark. They took it to the house of a Levite named Abinadab. He was happy to have it, and put his son Eleazar in charge of it.

2. It took a long time for the people of Israel to finally realize how wrong it was to worship idols. All that time the ark was in the house of Abinadab. Finally, under Samuel's leadership, the people began to come back to the Lord again.

3-4. One day Samuel sent this message to all Israel: "If you have decided to come back to the Lord, then you must get rid of your idols, whether they're in your cities or in your houses." It took some time, but finally the people did it.

5. When Samuel saw this, he sent word to the tribal leaders to come together to dedicate themselves and their people to the Lord. He said, "I will come there to meet with you and pray for you."

6. When the leaders got there, they fasted and prayed and confessed their sins. They said, "Lord, please forgive us and help us not to turn away from You again." Then as evidence of their sincerity they voted for Samuel to become their governor and

supreme judge. They gave him authority over the whole country.

7-8. When the Philistines heard about this, their five city kings joined forces to attack Israel. And when the Israelites heard that, they were afraid. They went to Samuel and said, "Please pray for us. Only the Lord can protect us from this big Philistine attack."

9-10. So Samuel offered a lamb and prayed for Israel. The Lord heard his prayer and answered it. In fact, the Philistines attacked while the sacrifice was still burning. So the Lord sent a huge thunderstorm with lots of lightning on the Philistines, and they withdrew in confusion.

11. When the Israelites saw that, they went after the retreating Philistines and chased them almost all the way home, killing many of them on the way.

12-13. Then Samuel had the people set up a large stone, and they named it Ebenezer, meaning The Lord Helped Us Before and He Will Help Us Again. As long as Samuel ruled, the Philistines did not attack Israel.

14. In fact, the Philistines gave back all the Israelite cities and towns they had occupied and controlled. So Israel recovered all its territories, and there was peace between them and all their neighbors.

15-17. Samuel was the judge and governor of Israel. Every year he would make his rounds to the major cities in the country to hold court and settle problems. Then he would return to Ramah, where he lived and where he had built an altar to the Lord.

Israel Wants a King

8 As Samuel grew older, he turned more and more responsibility over to his two sons. They governed the southern part of the country, but did not follow their father's

example. They were more interested in money than in serving the Lord. Soon they were accepting bribes to twist the law.

4-5. So the tribal leaders came to Samuel and said, "You're getting old, and your sons are not like you. We need a strong central government with a king who can enforce the law. That way we can be more of a united country like other nations, instead of being made up of tribes."

6-7. When Samuel heard that, he was really hurt. But he said nothing and took it to the Lord in prayer. The Lord said, "You're not hearing what the leaders are really saying. They're not rejecting you; they're rejecting Me. They don't want Me to be their king. They want someone they can see and show off, as do other nations."

8-9. "This has been their attitude off and on ever since they left Egypt. This is the same problem that Moses faced at Sinai when the people made the golden calf. They wanted a god they could see so that they could be like other nations. Now you know what it feels like to be rejected. But warn them what a king will do to them."

10-11. So Samuel told the tribal leaders everything the Lord had said. Then he warned them about having a king. He said, "Have you ever thought how much it will cost the country to support a king? He'll want to have a standing army with horses and chariots."

12-13. "He'll need officers to lead his troops and others to make his weapons of war. He'll want laborers to work his fields and reap his crops. And he'll need workers to bake and cook for his troops and to serve in his palace."

14-16. "He'll take the best of your fields, vineyards, and olive groves

for his servants. He won't even ask if he can have them. Then he'll have you pay more taxes so that he and his family can live in luxury as other kings do. He'll take the best of your sons and daughters to serve him, and you won't be able to do a thing about it.

17-18. "You'll end up having to do whatever he tells you. He'll also be the final court of appeal. Whatever he says will be law. When that happens, you'll cry to the Lord for help and will wish you had never had a king. But the Lord will not help solve your problem, because you didn't listen to Him. You'll have to learn from experience."

19-20. The leaders said, "We have thought about all this. But we still want a king. He will not only head our government but lead our men into battle as other kings do."

21-22. When Samuel saw how determined they were, he told the Lord about it. The Lord said, "Give them what they want." Then Samuel told the tribal leaders that they could have a king. But for now, they should go back home. The Lord would pick a king and let them know.

Samuel and Saul

9 A wealthy farmer from the tribe of Benjamin had a son named Saul. Saul was good-looking and a head taller than anyone in Israel.

3-4. One day some of his family's donkeys got lost. So his father asked Saul to take a servant and go look for them. Saul and his servant searched the whole area, even up into the nearby mountains, but the donkeys were nowhere to be found.

5-6. Then Saul said, "Let's go back, or my father will start worrying about us." The servant answered, "Let's make one more stop. Let's go to see

Samuel. Maybe he can tell us where the donkeys are."

7-8. Saul replied, "We don't have a gift or a sacrifice." The servant said, "I have a small silver coin. If he accepts it and tells us where the donkeys are, it will be worth it."

9-10. In those days people believed that if someone wanted a direct answer from God he should go to see the prophet. Saul said to his servant, "All right, let's go." So they went to the little city of Ramah, where Samuel lived, which was on a hill.

11-12. As they approached the city, they met some young women coming out to draw water from the well. They asked, "Is the prophet in town?" The women answered, "Yes. In fact, he came back home just ahead of you. If you want to talk to him you'd better hurry, because he'll be going up to the high place to offer sacrifices."

13-14. "You shouldn't have any trouble finding him, because he's inviting people to the service. He offers sacrifices, and then all those who are there eat a sacred meal together." As Saul and his servant hurried into town, Samuel was coming out to go to the high place to offer sacrifices.

15-16. Now, the day before, the Lord had told Samuel about Saul and his servant. He had said, "Tomorrow I'll send you a man from the tribe of Benjamin. I want you to anoint him as king over Israel. He'll serve under My authority. I know what the Philistines are doing to Israel. So I have chosen him to deliver My people."

17-18. When Samuel saw Saul and his servant, the Lord said to him, "This is the man." Saul had never met Samuel. So he stopped Samuel and asked, "Sir, can you tell us where to find the prophet?"

19-20. Samuel answered, "I am the

prophet. I've been expecting you. Come along to the high place. After worship, join us for the sacred meal, and we can talk. Tomorrow you can go home. And don't worry about the donkeys. They've been found. You're from the kind of family that the people have been looking for to find a leader."

21. Saul repounded, "But I belong to the smallest tribe there is. And my family isn't even that great in our own tribe. So why would you say something like that?"

22-23. They went on up to the high place, and after the service Samuel had Saul and his servant sit next to him. There were about thirty guests there that day. As the cook was getting things ready, Samuel said to him, "Take the piece of meat I told you to set aside, and give it to the tall man sitting next to me."

24. Samuel said to Saul, "I've saved this piece of meat especially for you because the Lord told me that you would be coming." So Saul and his servant ate with Samuel.

25. After the meal, Samuel took Saul to his house. They enjoyed the evening talking together about God's plan for Israel.

26-27. Early the next morning Samuel woke up Saul and his servant and told them they needed to get going. Samuel said he would go with them part of the way. When they got out of town, he said to Saul, "Tell your servant to go on ahead, because I have a message for you from the Lord."

Samuel Anoints Saul

10 Then Samuel took a small container of olive oil and asked Saul to bend over. He poured a little oil on Saul's head. Samuel then kissed Saul on both cheeks and said, "This oil means that the Lord has

anointed you to rule Israel.

2-4. "On the way home you'll meet two men who will tell you that the donkeys have been found and that your father is now worried about you. Later you'll meet three men. One will have three baby goats, another three loaves of bread, and another a container of grape juice. They'll offer you two loaves of bread, which you should accept.

5-6. "When you get near home, you'll meet a group of ministerial students coming down the hill singing hymns, accompanied by flutes and harps. The Holy Spirit will come on you, and you'll join them in singing. You'll sing songs that you've never known before. The Lord will open your mind to know Him even better and will give you the gift of leadership.

7-8. "After these three experiences, go on home and do your regular work. But the Lord will not forget you. In time He will impress you to go to Gilgal. I'll be there offering sacrifices. Then I'll tell you what the Lord wants you to do."

9-10. As Saul was listening to Samuel, the Lord changed his heart, and he became a new man. And the things that Samuel had told him happened to Saul that same day. He met two men, then three men, and when he got close to home he met a group of ministerial students. Then the Holy Spirit came on Saul, and he joined them in singing.

11-13. People who knew him asked, "Has Saul decided to study for the ministry?" A man nearby replied, "What difference does it make who studies for the ministry? The most important thing is that a person is called." After the students stopped singing and went back up the hill to worship, Saul went with them.

14-16. When Saul and his servant got

home, his uncle asked, "Where have you two been?" They answered, "We've been looking for the lost donkeys. When we couldn't find them, we went to see Samuel." His uncle asked, "What did Samuel say?" Saul replied, "He told us that the donkeys had been found and that we should go on home." But he didn't tell his uncle what else had happened.

Saul Made King

17-18. The time finally came for Samuel to let the people know that the Lord had chosen Saul to be their king. So he called the people together, and when they came he said to them, "This is what the God of Israel says: 'I brought you out of Egypt into this land and delivered you from your enemies.

19. "I am the one who helps you and stands by you in times of trouble. After all this, you rejected Me and asked for a king to fight for you. I will give you what you asked for. Arrange yourselves by tribes and families.'"

20-21. Then Samuel presented the leaders of each tribe to the Lord, and the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. After that, the family of Saul was chosen, and finally Saul himself. But when the leaders and the people looked for him, they couldn't find him.

22-24. They asked the Lord where Saul was. He said, "He's hiding among the supplies." So they went and got him. When he stood up, he was a head taller than anyone else. Samuel said, "This is the man the Lord has chosen to be your king. There is no other man as tall and strong in all of Israel." The people shouted, "Long live the king!"

25-26. Then Samuel told the tribal leaders the rights and duties of a king. When he was done, he dismissed the people and sent them

home. Later he wrote these things in a book and placed it in the sanctuary for reference. Saul, too, left for home, and some of the most powerful leaders went with him.

27. But others objected to Saul's being chosen as king. They said, "How can someone who would hide among the supplies be a king?" Saul said nothing. When he got home, he sent the leaders who had come with him away and quietly went about his work.

Saul Defeats Israel's Enemies

11 Later the king of the Ammonites decided to attack the Israelite city of Jabesh Gilead. The city fathers sent word to the Ammonite king: "Make a peace treaty with us, and we'll submit to your rule."

2-3. The king answered, "I'll make a peace treaty with you if you let me put out everyone's right eye." The city fathers replied, "Give us one week to see if any Israelite tribes will come and help us." The king agreed, because he thought Israel was too weak to fight his army.

4-6. The city fathers sent two messengers to Saul and his people to tell them what was happening. When the people heard it, they wept. And when Saul came home and saw them crying, he asked, "What's this crying all about?" So they told him. Then the power of the Holy Spirit came on Saul, and he was filled with righteous anger.

7-8. He slaughtered two oxen and sent pieces to the leaders of all the tribes with this message: "This will happen to the cattle of anyone who refuses to come and help Saul and Samuel against this wicked king." When the tribes got the message, thousands of men came to Saul to make up his army.

9-10. Then Saul sent a message to the people of Jabesh Gilead that he was coming to help them. When the people heard it, they shouted for joy. They sent word to the wicked king, "Tomorrow at noon the time is up. If no one comes to help us, we'll surrender and submit to your demands."

11. At dawn the next morning Saul and his men attacked the wicked king from three sides. By noon the king had been defeated and many of his troops killed. The rest of them ran, scattering everywhere.

12-13. When the battle was over, Saul's men asked, "Where are those who thought that Saul was not fit to be our king? We'll kill them." Saul replied, "No one will be killed. Today is a day of victory! It's time to praise the Lord!"

14-15. Then Samuel sent word to the leaders of all the tribes to come together to officially crown Saul king of Israel. So they came and made Saul their king. Then they brought peace offerings to the Lord and celebrated.

Samuel Retires

12 Then Samuel said to the leaders, "You now have a king over you as you wanted. He's your leader. As for me, I am old. I've served the Lord since I was a boy. And I've been your governor for many years.

3. "If I have done anything wrong, I want you to tell me right here in the presence of your king. Have I ever taken anything from anyone? Have I cheated anyone? Have I ever taken a bribe, twisted the law, or been unfair to anyone? If so, I want you to tell me now, so I can make things right."

4-5. The leaders answered, "We have never heard any complaints about you from anyone." Samuel said, "The Lord and your king are witnesses of

what you have said." Then the leaders replied, "Yes, the Lord is our witness."

6-7. Samuel continued: "Let me remind you of a few things. It was the Lord who chose Moses and Aaron to be our leaders when He brought us out of Egypt. Before you forget, let me tell you a few of the wonderful things that the Lord has done for our people. **8-10.** "Not long after Jacob went to Egypt, our people were made slaves. They cried to the Lord, and He brought them out of Egypt into this land. But soon they forgot what God had done for them. So He let the Philistines and others come against them. Then they cried to the Lord, confessed their sins, and promised to love and serve Him.

11-12. "The Lord heard their cries and gave them such leaders as Gideon to defeat their enemies. God has come to your rescue many times. But when the Ammonites threatened you, you got scared and demanded a king. You forgot that the Lord was your king.

13-14. "So here is your king—tall, strong, and now a successful general. The Lord gave you the kind of man you wanted. But you need to repent of losing confidence in the Lord and promise to obey Him. Then all will go well with you and your king.

15-17. "But if you don't listen to the Lord, He will stop protecting you. He has done this to our people before. To let you know that I'm speaking for the Lord, I'm going to ask God to send a violent thunderstorm, but it will not touch your crops. Besides, this is the dry season, so what you see should make an impression on you."

18-19. Samuel prayed, and the Lord sent a terrible thunderstorm over the whole area, but it did not hurt the crops. The earth began to shake, and

the leaders became very frightened. Then they cried to Samuel and said, "Please pray that the Lord won't strike us with lightning! We admit that we have done wrong by asking for a king!"

20-21. The Lord accepted their repentance and the storm stopped. Then Samuel said, "Don't be afraid. You confessed your sin, and the Lord has forgiven you. So now don't turn your backs on Him, but love Him with all your heart and soul and mind. Don't go back to worshiping idols. They can never save you from your enemies."

22. "You belong to the Lord. He loves you, and for the sake of His own name He will be with you. He has chosen you to be His special people."

23-24. "As for me, I won't stop praying for you. I will do all I can to help you and to teach you what's right. Just stay close to the Lord. Respect Him, and do what He tells you to do with all your heart. Never forget what He has done for you."

25. "But if you lose confidence in the Lord and turn back to idols, you and your king will be conquered and destroyed."

Saul and the Philistines

13 Saul ruled Israel for forty years, beginning when he was about thirty years old. In his second year as king he began to drive the Philistines out of the country.

3-4. He and his son Jonathan joined forces and took 3,000 troops to fight the Philistines. When the Philistines called for more troops, so did Saul. The people knew that this meant all-out war. So men came from all parts of the country to join the army.

5-7. The Philistines had 3,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, and thousands of foot soldiers. The Israelites were scared because they remembered

that the Philistines had defeated them before and had even taken the ark. Then some of Saul's troops went and hid in caves. Others crossed the Jordan River to get away. Soon there were not many troops left.

8-9. Then Saul sent for Samuel to come and offer sacrifices for him. To test Saul's faith, Samuel said to wait for seven days, and then he would come. During this time Saul didn't do anything to strengthen his faith. Near the end of the week he decided to offer sacrifices to the Lord while wearing his armor and sword.

10-12. Just as he finished, Samuel arrived. When he realized what Saul had done, he asked, "Why did you do this? Couldn't you have waited just a little longer?" Saul answered, "When I saw my men leaving, and after waiting six days, I got desperate. I had to do something to keep them."

13. Samuel replied, "That was a very foolish thing to do. You know that only priests are allowed to offer sacrifices, and even then, they have to be dressed properly. If the Lord lets your family continue to govern Israel, it will look like He approved of what you did. If only you had waited a little longer, things could have been different."

14. "But now the Lord can't let your royal house continue. You disobeyed, and everybody knows it. So the Lord will choose someone else to be king—someone who will obey Him and put God first in his life."

15-16. Then Samuel left and went back home. When Saul counted his troops, out of the thousands that had been there only 600 were left. Still he decided to show how fearless he was, so he marched his men to face the Philistines.

No Weapons

17-18. In the meantime the Philistines sent three raiding parties into Israel to get food for their men. The people did not fight back.

19-22. The Philistines controlled all the iron that came into the country, so the Israelites had no way to make swords or any other weapons. They even had to buy their farming tools from the Philistines and had to pay in silver to have them sharpened. Only Saul and Jonathan had swords; their troops had only bows and arrows and slingshots.

23. When the Philistines heard that Saul and Jonathan had joined forces, they immediately sent extra troops to the front in case they were needed.

Jonathan's Faith

14 The Lord impressed Jonathan to attack the camp of the Philistines. So he said to his armor boy, "Let's sneak up to their outpost and catch them by surprise." But Jonathan didn't tell his father where he was going.

2-3. Meanwhile, Saul had set up camp not far away. He had a priest with him who was a descendant of Eli. No one noticed that Jonathan was gone.

4-6. To get to the nearby Philistine outpost, Jonathan and his armor boy had to go through a rocky pass with high cliffs on both sides. Jonathan said, "Because of these overhanging cliffs, no one will see us until we're right at the outpost. Pray that the Lord will be with us. He can give victory to many or to few."

7-8. His armor boy replied, "Good idea. Let's trust in the Lord and go." Jonathan said, "All right. We'll make our way down the pass, and when we get close to the outpost, we'll let the Philistines see us.

9-10. "If they say, 'Stay where you are and we'll come down and teach you a lesson,' then we'll slip away and go back to camp. But if they say, 'If you're looking for a fight, then come up and we'll give you one,' then we'll go up because the Lord is with us."

11-12. When they got near the outpost, the Philistines saw them and laughed. They said, "Look! The Hebrews are so scared of us that they hide in holes in the ground." Then they shouted, "If you're looking for a fight, come on up and we'll give you one!" Jonathan said to his helper, "This is the sign we've been praying for. Follow me."

13-14. They went a little farther and crawled up the side of the cliff toward the outpost. The Philistines lost sight of them and thought they had gone back to camp. So Jonathan and his armor boy caught the guards by surprise and killed them. When the other guards came running, they killed them, too.

15. Then the earth began to shake, and the Philistines realized that God was with Jonathan and against them. They panicked and became so confused that they thought their buddies returning from a raid into Israel were Hebrews. So they started fighting them, and the two groups began killing each other.

16-18. Saul's men also felt the earthquake. When they looked over to the Philistines, they saw them running in all directions. Saul took a quick count of his men, and Jonathan and his armor boy were missing. He said to the priest, "Pray and ask the Lord what we should do. We'll get ready in case we have to go to battle."

19-21. As Saul was talking to the priest, the noise from the Philistine side got louder and louder. Saul said,

"Forget it! There's no time to pray now!" So he took his troops and rushed over to the other side and saw the Philistines killing each other. Then some of the local Hebrews who had been hired to help the Philistines decided to help Saul.

22. When news spread that Saul and his son Jonathan were winning, the men who had gone home or into hiding came back to help. Now the Philistines were on the run, and the Hebrews went after them.

23. The Lord had turned the situation around and was helping the Hebrews win. Saul and his men went after the Philistines and pursued them all the way back to the border.

Saul's Mistake

24. By the end of the day Saul's men were worn out. He had made them take an oath not to eat anything until they had complete victory over the Philistines.

25-28. As they were going through the woods, they came across a wild bees' nest with lots of honey. No one dared to take any. But Jonathan had not heard about the oath. So he ate some, and it gave him extra energy. One of the men saw him and told him what Saul had commanded. Then he added, "That's why we feel so weak."

29-30. Jonathan said, "That was a foolish thing for my father to do. Our men don't have the energy to go after the Philistines as they should."

31-32. When the day was over, the Israelites had defeated the Philistines, but not totally, because they were too exhausted. When evening came and the time for the oath ended, they were so hungry that they took any animal they could find and ate the meat before it was fully roasted.

33-35. Someone told Saul, and he

really got mad. He accused his troops of being traitors to the Hebrew faith because they had eaten meat with blood still in it. Then he asked them to bring the sheep and calves to him. He had the priest sacrifice the animals to the Lord, and then the men could finish eating.

36-37. After they ate, Saul said, "Tonight let's go down and invade the main Philistine camp. In the morning we can enjoy the spoils of war." The men agreed. But the priest said, "Let's ask the Lord what to do." Saul agreed and prayed, but the Lord didn't answer him.

38-39. Saul thought that maybe the reason the Lord didn't answer was that someone had broken the oath. So he said, "Whoever sinned by breaking the oath we made to the Lord will pay for it with his life, even it's my own son!" No one said a thing.

40-42. Saul demanded, "All right. Let's draw lots. You men stand over there, and I and my son will stand over here." The officers agreed. Then Saul prayed again and asked the Lord to point out anything he or his son might have done that wasn't right. So they drew lots, and it fell on Saul and his son. They drew lots again, and it fell on Jonathan.

43-44. Saul said, "What have you done? Tell me!" Jonathan said, "I ate a little honey while going after the Philistines. Do I have to die for that when I didn't even know about the oath?" Saul shouted, "That's no excuse! You'll pay for it with your life, because you have kept us from going after the Philistines tonight and totally defeating them."

45-46. But the officers defended Jonathan and said to Saul, "Should we take the life of someone whom the Lord used to give us the victory we

just had? Never! No one will touch Jonathan!" That's how Jonathan's life was spared. Then Saul lost his courage, withdrew his troops, and went back home.

47-48. But Saul didn't stop fighting. He just fought Israel's other enemies instead. He even fought against the powerful Amalekites.

49-51. Saul had two other sons besides Jonathan. He also had two daughters. And the commander of his army was his cousin Abner. Saul's father and Abner's father were brothers.

52. All through his life Saul had to keep fighting off the Philistines. He determined to have a big army, so he took every strong and brave man that he saw.

Saul's Second Chance

15 One day Samuel went to see Saul and said, "When the Lord told me to anoint you as king, I did. Now listen to what the Lord says and do exactly what He tells you to do.

2-3. "This is what the Lord says: 'The Amalekites have been cruel to My people. All these years they haven't changed, so attack them and show no mercy.'"

4-6. So Saul called out the full army, and thousands came from all over the country. First he set up an ambush against the Amalekites. Then he sent a message to the Israelites and others living in the area to get away before the war started.

7-9. After that Saul attacked and totally defeated the Amalekites. He told his men to kill all the enemy troops and their animals but to bring the king back alive. So that's what his men did, except that they kept the best sheep and goats for themselves. And Saul did nothing to stop them.

Saul Rejected as King

10-11. Then the Lord said to Samuel, "I'm disappointed with Saul. This is the second time he has publicly disobeyed Me. I will have to stop blessing him, or the people will think that I don't care whether the king obeys Me or not." When Samuel heard that, he cried. He prayed all night asking the Lord to find another way to solve the problem.

12-13. Early the next morning he went to see Saul. The people told him that Saul had moved his troops to another place. So he went there. Saul welcomed Samuel, saying, "I've got some good news for you. We've defeated the Amalekites and destroyed all their troops and animals, just as the Lord said we should."

14-15. Samuel asked, "Where did all these animals in the camp come from?" Saul answered, "The troops saved these animals to sacrifice to the Lord. That way they don't have to sacrifice their own. I thought that was a good idea. We destroyed everything else the Lord asked us to."

16-17. Samuel said, "Stop! Don't tell me any more. Let me tell you what the Lord says." Saul replied, "Tell me." Samuel answered, "The Lord is very disappointed with you. He made you king of Israel, and it's gone to your head.

18-19. "He asked you to totally destroy the Amalekites, including their animals, because they have been so heartless and cruel. The Lord was giving you another chance to show the people that you listen to Him and obey Him. You knew that your men were disobeying the Lord, and yet you did nothing about it."

20-21. Saul said, "But I did obey. I defeated our worst enemies, destroyed everything they had, and even cap-

tured their king. The troops were the ones who took the animals to sacrifice to the Lord."

22-23. Samuel replied, "What makes the Lord happy are not sacrifices and offerings, but love and obedience. Disobedience and rebellion are as bad as witchcraft. Pride and arrogance are as bad as worshiping idols. Since you publicly disobeyed the Lord twice, He not only will discontinue the rule of your royal house but will stop blessing you as well."

24-25. Then Saul realized what he had done and pleaded with Samuel not to go. He said, "Don't leave me! I didn't listen to you as I should have. I was afraid to confront my troops, but gave in to them. Please forgive me and stay with me. The people respect you, and we can worship the Lord together."

26. Samuel answered, "I can't worship the Lord with you, because the people will think that I approve what you did. You disobeyed the Lord again, and everybody knows it. He is no longer supporting you as king. Do you understand that?"

27-29. As Samuel turned to leave, Saul grabbed the edge of Samuel's robe and tore it. Samuel said, "Just as you tore my robe, so the Lord will tear Israel away from you and give it to someone He can trust. God isn't like us. He doesn't lie. He doesn't change His mind once He says something. So don't get the idea that you can change it."

30-31. Saul replied, "I disobeyed. I admit it. What else can I do? Don't humiliate me by turning your back on me. Have some compassion." So Samuel went before the troops to make things right with the Lord, and he and Saul worshiped together.

32. Then Samuel said, "Let me see the enemy king." So they brought him out. His name was Agag the Violent.

The king was scared and acted very humble. He said, "Let's forget the past and let all fighting between our people stop."

33. Samuel knew that the king didn't really mean it. So he said, "You have been very cruel, even killing little children. So your mother will be childless too." Then Samuel asked for a sword and put the king to death.

34-35. After that, Samuel went home, and Saul dismissed his troops, except his special fighters. Samuel never went to see Saul again. For the rest of his life he grieved for Saul and what he had done. The Lord, too, grieved over Saul and over how the people had insisted on having their own king.

God Chooses David

16 Not long afterward the Lord said to Samuel, "How much longer will you mourn over Saul's misbehavior? I have rejected him as king, and there's no way to change that. I want you to take some olive oil and go to Bethlehem to the house of Jesse. I have chosen one of his sons to be king."

2-3. Samuel replied, "Lord, if Saul finds out, he'll have me killed!" The Lord said, "Take a sacrifice with you and worship with the people there, as you do in other places. And don't worry—I'll protect you. Be sure to invite Jesse and his family to the service. I'll tell you what to do next."

4-5. When Samuel got to Bethlehem, the city fathers wondered why the prophet had come to see them. Maybe something was wrong. They asked, "Is this a peaceful visit?" Samuel answered, "Yes. I've come to worship with you, as I do in other cities. So come and join me." Then he stopped at Jesse's house and invited his family too.

6. When the worship service was over, and before they ate together, Samuel asked Jesse to introduce him to his sons. Jesse started with Eliab, the oldest. Samuel thought, "This must be the one the Lord has in mind. He's the picture of a king."

7. The Lord said, "Don't judge a man by how tall and strong he is or by his looks. I look at a man's heart and his willingness to obey Me. Eliab is not the one."

8-11. One by one Jesse introduced his seven sons who were at home. But each time the Lord said, "No, this is not the one." Samuel asked Jesse, "Do you have any more sons?" Jesse answered, "I have one more. He's out in the field taking care of the sheep." Samuel said, "Send for him. We won't eat this special meal until he comes."

12. So Jesse sent for David. The young man was rugged and handsome. Samuel noticed the sparkle in his eyes when he mentioned God to him. The Lord said, "This is the one. Put some oil on his head before you leave."

13. Then the city fathers and the guests sat down and ate together. After the meal, as everyone was busy saying goodbye, Samuel took David aside and put a little oil on his forehead. Then David went back to take care of the sheep, and Samuel went home. From that day on, the Holy Spirit came on David with added power.

David and Saul

14-16. Meanwhile Saul kept thinking more and more about the kingship that he had lost, and he listened less and less to the Lord. At times it seemed as though he was controlled by the devil. One day his servants said to him, "Why don't you let us find someone who can play the harp and sing for you? That would make you feel better."

17-18. Saul said, "That's a good idea.

Go find someone like that." His advisers said, "There's a handsome young man in Bethlehem who can do just that. He'd also make a brave soldier for you. There's no doubt that God is with him."

19-20. So Saul sent word to Jesse, saying, "Let your son who takes care of the sheep come and serve me. I would be pleased to have him." So Jesse called David from the field, loaded a donkey with gifts, and told him to take a baby goat as a present to the king.

21-22. When Saul met David, he was very pleased with him. He accepted the gifts and had him play and sing for him. The music calmed his spirit, so he decided to keep David. He sent word to Jesse and said, "I'm very pleased with your son. Do let him stay and serve me." And Jesse did.

23. So whenever Saul got depressed and the devil was bothering him, he would call David to come to play and sing for him. David would sing about the Lord, which would make Saul feel a lot better.

David and Goliath

17 About this time the Philistines decided to get even with Saul and Jonathan over their defeat. They marched their troops to the hill by the border, and Saul and his troops went and camped on the other hill.

4-7. One day a giant named Goliath came out and challenged Israel to a fight. He was huge man, more than nine feet tall. His armor alone weighed more than 100 pounds. He wore bronze leg guards and carried a spear with a metal tip weighing fifteen pounds. A soldier walked in front of him carrying his huge shield.

8-10. Goliath shouted, "Why do we

need armies to settle our differences? Just send a man over here, and he and I will fight. If he wins, we will be subject to you. If I win, your people will be subject to us." When no one answered, he cursed and defied their armies and the God of Israel.

11. Saul, too, was big, and had armor and a sword. But when he and his men saw the size of Goliath, they were all afraid.

12-15. Now, Jesse had eight sons. The three oldest had joined the army, and David was serving Saul. The other four were home helping their father, who was getting old. When David wasn't needed to play and sing for Saul, he would go home to help take care of the sheep.

16. Every morning Goliath challenged Israel. He did this for forty days, but not one of Saul's men responded.

17-19. About this time Jesse said to David, "I would like you to take some food to your brothers facing the Philistines, and some special cheeses to their officers. Then come back to let me know how things are going."

20-22. So David made arrangements for others to take care of his sheep, and early the next morning he left. He got to the camp just as the men were lining up for battle. Both armies were waiting for the signal to attack. David asked someone to watch the things he had brought, and then ran to find his brothers.

23-24. When he found them, he told them about the food his father had sent. As they were talking, Goliath came out of the ranks and shouted another challenge. No one responded. Again he cursed their armies and the God of Israel. When the men saw how angry and defiant Goliath was, they were afraid.

25. They remarked, "Look at his size!

Did you hear how he curses us and our God? Saul will give a big reward to anyone who can fight him and kill him. He'll give him his daughter in marriage, and exempt his father's family from ever paying taxes."

26-27. David heard Goliath's challenge and asked his brothers, "Why are you letting this man defy our God? He can't do that and get away with it!" Then he asked what reward the men were talking about. They told him.

28-30. David's older brother thought David was interested in the reward. He said to him, "Why don't you go home and take care of the sheep? You just want to stay and watch us fight." David answered, "Don't get so upset. I only asked a question. God's honor is at stake." Then David asked the other men, and they told him.

31-33. When Saul heard how concerned David was about Israel's honor, he sent for him. David said, "Sir, no one should be afraid of this Philistine. If there isn't anyone to fight him, I will." Saul laughed and said, "You can't fight this giant. You're only a youth. This Philistine has been fighting since he was young."

34-36. David said, "Sir, I've been watching my sheep since I was a child. There were times when a lion or a bear would come and grab a little lamb. Then I would go after it. When it dropped the lamb and turned on me, I would use my staff and sling and kill it. I'll kill this Philistine too for cursing and defying our God.

37. "The Lord helped me against lions and bears, and He'll do the same for me now." Saul was amazed at David's courage. So he said, "All right, son, go ahead. You have my permission. May the Lord be with you."

38-39. Before Saul let him go, he insisted that David wear some armor.

So they put armor on him, a helmet on his head, and strapped a sword to his side. David could hardly move. He said to Saul, "Sir, I can't fight with these things on." So he took them off and thanked Saul for his kindness.

40. Then David took his shepherd's rod and sling and ran past the troops and down into the valley. He stopped at the brook and carefully picked out five smooth stones and put them in his little bag. Then he headed up the other side to face Goliath.

41-42. Goliath saw him coming and went out to meet him. As they got closer, he saw that David was only a youth with no armor and a shepherd's rod. Goliath thought the Hebrews were making fun of him, so he flew into a rage.

43-44. He shouted to David, "Do you think I'm a dog, that you come after me with a stick?" Then he cursed the God of Israel and said, "Come, you little fool! I'll make short work of you and feed your body to the birds."

45. David shouted back, "You're coming against me with armor, sword, and spear. But I come against you in the name of the God of Israel, whom you have defied.

46-47. "Today the Lord will give you into my hands, and I will cut off your head. The birds will eat your body, and the animals will chew on your bones. Then everyone will know that there is a God in Israel. He doesn't need a sword or spear to win. This battle belongs to the Lord."

48-50. When Goliath heard that, he got so mad that he pushed back his helmet and headed for David. David ran toward him, reached into his little bag, took out a stone, put it in his sling, and slung it with all his might. The stone whizzed through the air. It hit the giant in the forehead with such

force that he staggered and fell face-down on the ground.

51-53. Then David ran over, pulled out Goliath's sword, and cut off his head. When the Philistines saw that, they turned and ran. The men of Israel let out a war cry and took off after them. They chased them all the way back to their own cities. Dead Philistines lay everywhere. And the men of Israel plundered their camps.

54. David took Goliath's head to Saul and gave all the credit to God. He gave the sword to the high priest to be kept at the sanctuary, but he kept the armor at his home in Bethlehem.

55-57. As Saul had watched David go out to fight Goliath, he asked Abner, his general, "Who is his father? I've forgotten." Abner said, "I really don't know." Saul replied, "Go and find out." So Abner went to meet David carrying Goliath's head. He took David to Saul and Jonathan.

58. Saul said, "Young man, we are so very proud of you. The Lord has used you to give us a great victory. Tell me about your father and his family." So David told Saul all he wanted to know.

Saul Becomes Jealous

18 As David talked to Saul, Jonathan's heart went out to him, and he loved David. They were so much alike. Saul kept David and would not let him go back home.

3-4. From that day on, David and Jonathan were like brothers. To seal their friendship, Jonathan took off his royal cloak and gave it to David. He also gave him his sword and his battle bow and arrows.

5. Whatever Saul asked David to do, he did it well. So Saul made him an officer in his army, which pleased the people very much.

6-9. One day, when David and Saul

came back from battle, the women sang, "Saul, the king, has killed thousands, but David, the shepherd, has killed ten thousands." This made Saul angry, and he became jealous because David was getting more credit than he was. From then on Saul watched David's every move.

10-11. The next day Saul became very depressed. So he called for David to come and play for him. Suddenly he began pacing the floor with a spear in his hand, shouting like a madman. All at once he turned and threw his spear at David, who dodged it. Then Saul picked it up and threw it at him again. And David dodged it again.

12-16. Saul was actually afraid of David, because he knew that the Lord was with him. He kept asking David to go and fight the Philistines, hoping he'd be killed. But each time David came back victorious. This made Saul even more afraid of David. But the people loved David, because they could see that the Lord was with him.

David Gets Married

17-18. One day Saul said to David, "I would like you to marry my oldest daughter; then you'll be part of the royal family. But you have to stay loyal to me and continue to fight the Philistines." David said, "Who am I that I should become the king's son-in-law?"

19-20. Saul insisted. But when the time came for the marriage, he suddenly changed his mind and gave Merab to another man. Now, Saul's younger daughter, Michal, had loved David from the moment she saw him.

21. When Saul heard about it, he said to himself, "Good! I can still carry out my plan." So he called for David and said, "I'm sorry about Merab, but Michal really loves you. So you can marry her, and that way

you can still become my son-in-law." But David hesitated.

22. So Saul asked his servants to urge David to marry Michal. He said, "Tell David how much I like him and how much everyone in the palace likes him. Tell him that the people want him to become the king's son-in-law."

23. So that's what they did. But David said, "It's a big responsibility to become the king's son-in-law. I'm poor. What can I give the king for his daughter?"

24-25. Then the servants went and told Saul what David had said. Saul replied, "Tell him that all he has to do is to kill 100 Philistines and bring me back the evidence." Saul was secretly hoping that David would be killed doing that.

26-27. When the servants told David what Saul had asked, he agreed. He went out and killed 200 Philistines and brought back the evidence. So David married Michal and became part of the royal family.

28-29. But when Saul saw how much Michal loved David and how much the Lord was blessing him, he determined more than ever to get rid of David.

30. The Philistines kept on attacking Israel. Yet every time Saul sent David out to fight, he came back victorious. He was more successful than any of Saul's officers and became a respected commander, not only at home but also among Israel's enemies.

Saul Goes After David

19 Saul became so jealous that he told his officers to kill David the first chance they had. But Jonathan loved David. So he warned David and said, "My father has told his officers to kill you. And if he gets a chance, he'll kill

you himself. Tomorrow he and I will be together, and I'll appeal to him for you. I'll let you know what he says."

4-5. The next day when Jonathan and his father were out in the field practicing, he said, "Father, don't do anything to hurt David. He's been a great help to you. He risked his life to fight Goliath, and the Lord gave you the victory because of him. Why would you want to kill him? If you do, God will hold you responsible."

6-7. Saul listened to Jonathan and changed his mind. He took an oath, "As sure as the Lord lives, David must not be killed." Later that day, Jonathan told David what his father had said and the promise he made under oath. Then Jonathan took David back to the palace, and Saul accepted him as before.

8-10. Once again the Philistines attacked Israel, and Saul sent David out to fight. After David's victory, Saul became depressed. He called for David to come and play for him. Suddenly he stood up and threw a spear at David so hard that when it hit the wall it stuck there. David ducked, then ran out into the darkness and made his way home.

11-12. Saul ordered his men to surround David's house. When he came out in the morning, they were to kill him. But Michal told David not to stay at home, because she knew that her father would stop at nothing to kill him. So she helped him lower himself out the window, and he escaped.

13-15. Michal then took a statue, put it in the bed, and put some goat's hair on its head to make it look as if David was asleep. The next morning, when David didn't come out, the men asked to see him. Michal told them that David was sick. The men went to the palace and told Saul, but he told them to bring David anyway, bed and all, and he would kill him.

16-17. The men went back, forced their way into the house, and found the statue in David's bed. When they told Saul what had happened, he called for Michal. "How could you do this to your father?" he asked. "You helped David escape and told my men that he was sick." She answered, "David threatened to kill me if I didn't help him escape." Saul believed her.

18-20. David went to see Samuel in Ramah and told him what had happened. Samuel welcomed David and invited him to stay there with the ministerial students. When Saul heard where David was, he ordered some men to go and get him. When they got there, the Holy Spirit took over, and they started praising the Lord.

21-22. When Saul heard that, he sent another group of men to get David. But the same thing happened. Then he sent a third group of men, and the same thing happened to them. Saul was furious. So he decided to go himself. When he got there, he asked where Samuel and David were. A man directed him to the prophet's place.

23-24. Before he got there, the Holy Spirit took over, and Saul started praising the Lord. And when he got to Samuel's place, he took off his cloak and armor and joined the students in worship. He stayed all night. When the people heard about it, they asked, "Has Saul been called to the ministry?"

Jonathan and David

20 David quickly left Samuel's place and went to see Jonathan. He said, "Your father is still trying to kill me. What have I done to deserve this?" Jonathan answered, "No! My father promised not to kill you. If he had changed his mind, he would have told me."

3-4. David replied, "I know that your

father wants to kill me. You don't know because you've been away. Besides, he knows we're close friends. That's why he didn't tell you. God knows that I'm only a step away from death." Jonathan asked, "What do you want me to do?"

5. David answered, "Tomorrow at sunset the Festival of the New Moon begins. I'm supposed to eat dinner with your family. But I should really go to see my father. So let me go home, and I'll come back day after tomorrow. I'll hide in the field until you come and tell me what to do.

6-7. "If your father asks where I am, tell him that our family is having a special meal together too, which is the truth, and that you gave me permission to go. If he says, 'Fine,' then you'll know that I'm safe, and you can come and tell me. But if he gets mad, you can be sure he's out to kill me.

8-9. "If I'm guilty of some crime and deserve to die, I'd rather have you kill me. We made a covenant to be brothers. Why should you turn me over to your father to kill me?" Jonathan replied, "Stop talking like that. If I had the least suspicion that my father wanted to kill you, wouldn't I tell you?"

10-11. David said, "You're the only one I really trust." Jonathan answered, "Come, let's go out to the field and talk some more." So that's what they did.

12-13. Jonathan said, "I promise the Lord that sometime during the festival I will find out how my father feels about you. If he feels good about you, I'll let you know. If he's determined to kill you, I'll tell you that too and help you get away. May the Lord be with you as He was with my father when he first became king.

14-17. "I know that God has called you to rule Israel. So when you take

over, be kind to me. If I get killed in battle before then, take care of my family. I know that the Lord will help you defeat our enemies. Let's seal the covenant we've made with an oath." So they did. Jonathan loved David as he loved himself.

18-19. Then Jonathan said, "Tomorrow evening the New Moon Festival begins. When you are not there and my father asks me where you are, I'll tell him what you said and watch his reaction. The next day when you come back, come back at night and hide behind that huge rock.

20-23. "When it gets light, I'll come here with a boy for target practice and shoot arrows in your direction. If I shout to the boy, 'The arrows are closer to me!' then you'll know that everything is all right. But if I shout to the boy, 'The arrows are way out there!' then you had better run, for my father is after you. Remember, God brought us together for life."

24. So David went to Bethlehem to be with his father. The next evening he came back in the dark and hid in the field behind the rock.

25. At the palace that first night, Saul sat at the head of the table with Abner, his general, on his right. Jonathan sat at the other end of the long table, and David was supposed to be at his right.

26-27. Saul said nothing. He thought that David would come after sunset for sure. But he didn't come that evening or the next day. That evening at the close of the festival, Saul asked Jonathan where David was.

28-29. Jonathan said, "David asked me for permission to see his father and his family. They wanted him to be there for the festival. So I let him go."

30-31. When Saul heard that David had honored his father more than the

king, he flew into a rage. He shouted, "You disobedient son! You're a disgrace to me and your mother. You've taken sides with David! Don't you know that he'll take your place as king unless we kill him? So go and get him, and I'll kill him myself. Go!"

32-34. Jonathan said, "Why should we kill him? He hasn't done anything wrong." When Saul heard that, he stood up and threw a spear at Jonathan. Fortunately Jonathan was quick enough to dodge it. Now he knew how much his father hated David. So he got up and left the room. That night he couldn't sleep for thinking about David.

35-38. The next morning he went out for target practice and took a boy with him to get the arrows. He shot a few, and when the boy ran to get them, Jonathan shouted, "There's another one or two way beyond that!" Then he shouted again, "Hurry! Keep going! Don't waste time!" The boy got all the arrows and brought them back.

39-40. Only David and Jonathan knew what this meant. Then Jonathan said to the boy, "Take my bow and arrows back to the palace. I guess I don't feel like target shooting today. But I think I'll stay out here to rest a while."

41. As soon as the boy was gone, David came out from behind the huge rock and ran toward Jonathan. He fell on his knees and bowed three times, honoring Jonathan as the prince. Then he stood, and they hugged each other and cried.

42. Jonathan said, "We're friends forever. You promised to watch over my family, and I promised to watch over yours. The Lord will help us to keep our promise." So David and Jonathan parted with the peace of God between them. David left, and Jonathan went back to the palace.

David Runs for His Life

21 David decided to go to the town where the sanctuary was kept and see the high priest. After they greeted each other, the high priest said to David, "Why is the king's son-in-law by himself and in such a hurry? Is something wrong?"

2-3. David said, "I'm on a secret mission for the king and have to meet my men at a certain time. Do you have any bread you can spare? I need at least five loaves."

4. The high priest said, "The only bread I have is the Lord's consecrated bread, those twelve flat loaves on the little table in the sanctuary. I'm sure the Lord won't mind if they keep you and your men from going hungry. Just make sure you're right with the Lord before you eat it. That's the same rule we have to follow."

5-6. David said, "We're right with the Lord. We always make sure of that before we go on a special mission." So the high priest gave him the twelve flat loaves. Then he ordered some more made to replace them. But David had not told the truth.

7. Now, one of Saul's herdsmen named Doeg happened to be there and overheard everything. He had to wait until evening before he could fulfill his vow to the Lord.

8-9. When David saw him, he decided to ask the high priest for a sword and said, "I left in such a hurry that I forgot to take one." The high priest said, "The only one I have is Goliath's, which you gave us. If you need it, you can have it." David said, "Thank you. I'll bring it back. There's no better sword to have than this one."

10-11. Without asking the Lord where to go, David decided to go to the Philistine city of Gath. When he got there, he asked to see the king. The

king's officials said, "Isn't this David, the future king of Israel? Isn't he the one the Hebrew women sing about?"

12-13. David was highly respected by the Philistines for his skill in warfare. So the king welcomed him and took such interest in him that David got scared of what he might do to him. So he pretended that he had gone crazy. He jerked his arms back and forth, ran into a wall, clawed at the doors, and let saliva run down his beard.

14-15. When the king saw that he shouted, "Look! He's lost his mind! Get him out of here! Don't I have enough of this kind of people in my own city?" So the officials guided David out of the palace and told him to leave the city and not come back.

David Returns to Israel

22 David was glad to get back to Israel, where he hid in a cave. When his brothers and other relatives found out where he was, they joined him for their own safety. And those who were disappointed with Saul, who were poor, and who wouldn't compromise their faith joined David. Soon there were more than 400 men, not counting their families.

3-4. Then David decided to go and hide in the mountains of the little country of Moab, not far from the capital city of Kir. He sent word to the king asking if he could take care of his elderly parents because it was too hard for them to live in the mountains. The king agreed because David's great-grandmother, Ruth, had come from Moab.

5. Now, the prophet Gad had joined David also. One day the Lord gave this message for David: "Don't stay here. Leave as fast as you can and go back to Israel." David and his men obeyed and went to live in the forest of Judah.

Saul Hunts for David

6-7. Saul went looking for David and set up camp in the hill country. Someone came and told him where David's new hiding place was. Saul said to his men, "Listen to me! Who told David that I was coming after him? When he becomes king, will he keep you in his army and reward you with fields and vineyards?"

8. "So why are some of you telling David my plans? No one told me about the covenant my son made with David. I had to find it out myself. David is supposed to be my personal aid, but he's just waiting for a chance to kill me, and Jonathan is encouraging him to do it. Whoever can tell me who the traitors are will get a big reward."

9-11. Then Doeg spoke up and said, "Your Majesty, when I was at the sanctuary I saw the high priest give David some bread and Goliath's sword. He even prayed for him." Doeg didn't like the high priest for pointing out his sins. So Saul sent for the high priest and all the priests in the village.

12-13. When they came, Saul said to the high priest, "Why did you turn against me by helping David? I heard that you gave him some bread and Goliath's sword. Now he and his men are plotting to kill me."

14-15. The high priest said, "David is one of your loyal subjects. He's your son-in-law and captain of your body guards. He and his family are highly respected. That's not the first time I prayed for David. Was it wrong for me to help him when he was on a secret mission for you? Besides, we haven't heard about a plan to kill you."

16-18. When Saul heard that, he flew into a rage and shouted, "You're going to pay for this! And so will your family!" Then he ordered his bodyguards to kill the high priest

and all those with him. But they refused. So Saul ordered Doeg and his men to do it, which they did.

19-20. Then Saul ordered some of his men to go to the village of Nob, where the priests were from, and kill everyone there, including their animals. They did. But Abiathar, the high priest's youngest son, had been sick. So he had not gone with his father to see Saul. When he heard that Saul's men were coming to the village, he escaped and went to join David.

21-22. He told David that Saul had killed his father and everyone in the village. David replied, "The day I stopped by the sanctuary to see your father, I noticed that Doeg was there. Something told me that he would tell Saul. So I'm the one responsible for the death of your father and all the others." Then David broke down and cried.

23. After he recovered, he said to the young man, "Stay with me. Don't be afraid of Saul, because he's trying to kill me, too. You'll be safe here."

David Saves a City

23 When David heard that the Philistines were taking the newly harvested grain from a little Canaanite city, he got mad. So he asked the Lord, "Should I go and fight the Philistines? Will You go with me?" The Lord said, "Yes, I will go with you."

3-4. But David's men didn't want to go. They said, "We're not strong enough. And if we attack the Philistines and Saul attacks us too, we'll never survive." So David asked the Lord again what he should do. The Lord said, "Go and fight the Philistines, and I'll help you."

5. David told his men what the Lord had said, so they attacked the Philistines and defeated them. Then

they gave the people back their cattle and grain. They also had kept them from being killed.

6. It was about this time that Abiathar, the son of the high priest, had joined David and his men. He brought with him the high priestly garments that his father had worn.

7-8. Saul heard that David had defeated the Philistines and where he was. He marched his troops to the Canaanite city, planning to surround it with David still inside.

9-10. When David got word that Saul was coming, he said to Abiathar, "Quick, put on the high priestly garments and the holy breastpiece and ask the Lord what to do!" Then David prayed, "Lord, we hear that Saul is coming. He'll kill everyone in this little city just to get me. If that happens, I'll be the one to blame."

11-12. "Are Saul and his men really coming? Will the people turn me over to him to save themselves? Tell me what will happen." The Lord answered, "Yes, Saul and his men will come, and the people will turn you over to him to save themselves."

13. So David and his men quickly left. When Saul heard that David had gone, he turned his troops around and went back home.

David Hides

14-15. When David got back to his hideout in the mountains, he posted some lookouts to watch for Saul. He knew that Saul would come after him again. He kept changing hideouts, and Saul kept on looking for him, but the Lord always protected David. One day he went to a nearby village to get some food. He heard that Saul was coming.

16-18. Now, Jonathan came to encourage David and strengthen his faith. He said to him, "Don't be afraid. My

father won't find you, for the Lord won't let him. The people know that you'll be the next king. I'll be by your side. Even my father knows that." Then the two of them renewed their covenant, and Jonathan went back home.

19-20. Some people went to tell Saul that David was in their area. They said, "Your Majesty, if you and your men come after David, we'll help look for him."

21-23. Saul answered, "May God bless you. I won't forget your kindness. Go back and make sure that David is where you say he is and keep an eye on him. Then come and tell me. If we know the specific area, we'll track him down and find him."

24-25. So the people went back home to locate David. They found that he and his men were in the area just south of there. So they sent word to Saul and his men to come. David heard that Saul was coming, so he moved deeper into the mountains. But Saul kept right after him.

26-27. Saul was on one mountain ridge, and David and his men were trying to get away along the other ridge. Suddenly a messenger came running up to Saul and said, "Your Majesty, the Philistines are invading our country! Come and help!"

28-29. So Saul took his troops and headed back home to fight the Philistines. Then David and his men left the area and headed east to find another place to hide.

David Spares Saul's Life

24 After Saul defeated the Philistines, he heard again where David was. So he took 3,000 of his best troops and began looking for him among the mountains. When they came to a large cave, Saul

went in because he had to. This was the same cave where David and his men were hiding.

4. When they saw Saul come into the cave, they whispered to David, "The Lord is helping you. This is your chance to kill him." Saul had taken off his armor, cloak, and sword, and gone to one side to relieve himself. Then David carefully crawled along the edge of the dark cave, reached out, and cut off a corner of Saul's cloak.

5-6. As he crawled back, his conscience bothered him. He whispered to his men, "May the Lord forgive me for having done this. Saul is the anointed ruler of Israel. I should never do anything to embarrass him. So don't get any ideas of killing him. He's still our king."

7-8. So David kept his men from killing Saul. They watched as Saul picked up his things and went to join his troops some distance away. Then David stepped out of the cave and shouted, "My lord, the king!" Saul turned and saw David standing in full view.

9-10. David respectfully bowed and said, "Why do you listen to those who tell you that I want to kill you? If I had really wanted to, I could have done so while you were in the cave. My men urged me to, but I told them that you were anointed by God and that I would do nothing to harm you."

11-12. "See this piece of cloth? It's a corner from your cloak. I cut it off while you were in the cave. I hope this convinces you that I'm not against you, much less that I want to kill you. Yet you keep coming after me as if I were a common criminal. May the Lord be our judge. He will decide which one of us has done wrong. He knows our hearts."

13-15. "Only evil people do evil things. I will never turn against you."

Why should the king chase someone as harmless as a dead dog or a flea? The Lord knows everything. He will take up my case and decide who's right and who's wrong. He will deliver me from the hands of your men."

16-18. Saul shouted, "David, my son, is that really you?" Then he broke down and cried. Through his tears he shouted back, "You're a good man, David, more righteous than I am. You've been good to me. What you just did shows the kind of man you are. You could have easily killed me, but didn't."

19-21. "When a soldier catches his enemy off guard, does he let him go? But you let me go. May the Lord reward you for what you did for me today. I know He has called you to be the next king. And Israel will prosper under your rule. Now promise me that you will be kind to my family and not kill any of them after I'm gone."

22. So David took an oath and promised to do what Saul asked. Then Saul and his men went back home, and David and his men went back into hiding.

The Death of Samuel

25 About this time Samuel died, and all Israel mourned for him. They buried him near his home in Ramah. David was very sad. He knew that Saul would come after him now. So he took his men to a different place.

David Listens to Advice

2-3. Now, there was a man named Nabal who had thousands of sheep and goats. He was very wealthy. He was away from home harvesting the wool from his sheep. He was a mean man with a very bad temper. His wife's name was Abigail. She was kind, intelligent, and beautiful.

4-5. All the time that David and his men were in that area, they had protected Nabal's flocks from raiders. So when David heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep, he chose some young men and said to them, "Before we move again, we need to make sure that we have enough food. Go to Nabal to see if he can help us."

6-8. "Say to him, 'Greetings from David. He's happy for how the Lord has blessed you. When your shepherds were in the field, he and his men protected your sheep. All that time not one was lost. You can ask your shepherds, and they'll tell you. So please be kind to him during this festive season and do what you can to help.'"

9-11. The young men went to see Nabal and gave him David's message. They patiently waited for him to answer. Finally, he looked up and said, "Who does David think he is? He's just another runaway servant. There are so many of them these days. Why should I help some stranger living in the wilderness?"

12-13. The young men went back and told David what Nabal had said. David called his men together and said, "So this is what we get for protecting his flocks. Strap on your swords! We're going to pay him a visit!" Then he put on his sword and took 400 men with him. The rest of them stayed behind to guard the supplies.

14-17. Meanwhile, one of Nabal's servants ran and told Abigail what had happened. He said, "David sent a kind message to your husband asking for help. But he insulted the men and told them to leave. These men have been protecting our flocks and have been very kind to us. You need to do something. Your husband won't listen to us."

18. Abigail knew exactly what to do. She told her servants to quickly

get 200 loaves of bread, two large containers of grape juice, meat from five sheep, five bushels of roasted wheat, and 300 pressed bunches of raisins and figs.

19-20. She said, "Load all this on some donkeys. You'll have to go slow, but go ahead. I'll catch up with you." She did all this without asking her husband. Then she got on her own donkey and caught up with her servants. Together they headed straight for David's camp.

21-22. On his way to Nabal, David said to himself, "We watched over this man's sheep day and night, and what do we get for it? Nothing but insults! As surely as the Lord lives, by tomorrow he and his servants will be dead men."

23. Then David saw a woman coming down the hill on a donkey, heading straight for him. Not far behind was a small caravan of donkeys. So he ordered his men to stop. When Abigail got there, she slid off her donkey and bowed to David.

24-25. Then she fell on her knees and said, "Sir, let the blame of my husband fall on me. Please listen. Nabal has nothing personal against you. He treats everybody this way and reaps the consequences. I'm sorry I wasn't there when your young men came."

26-27. "Please don't be angry. God has been kind to you. He kept you from killing Saul. So I know that the Lord will take care of your enemies in His own way. Please don't hurt anyone. Let these gifts I brought for you and your men take the place of what my husband should have done."

28-29. "Please forgive him. We know that God will make you our king, because you're not the kind who gets even with people. If someone tries to kill you, the Lord is there to protect

you. He watches over you as He would a precious treasure. He can pick up your enemies and sling them into the air as easily as He would a stone in a sling.

30-31. "When God places you on the throne of Israel, you should not take with you a record and a guilty conscience for having killed innocent people because of one man's foolishness. When you become king and the Lord blesses you, please remember me."

32-34. David's heart melted as he listened to Abigail. He asked her to get up from her knees and said, "I thank God that He has sent you. May He bless you for your good judgment and for stopping me from killing innocent workers. If you had not come, by tomorrow morning your husband and all his helpers would have been dead."

35. Then David accepted Abigail's gifts, thanked her, and said, "Go in peace. May God bless you for your kindness. What you said is right. We'll go back to camp."

36. By the time Abigail got home, her husband was already there. He had ordered his servants to prepare a banquet fit for a king and had invited his neighbors and friends to help celebrate his huge harvest of wool. He was in high spirits and was very drunk. So Abigail decided not to tell him about David.

37-38. The next morning she told him about David's intention and what could have happened to him. When her husband heard that, he had a stroke and became completely paralyzed. Ten days later he died.

39-40. When David learned what had happened, he said, "How thankful I am that the Lord took things into His own hands!" After the days of mourning, he sent a couple of young men to Abigail's house with this message:

"David wants to know if you're willing to become his wife."

41-42. Abigail listened respectfully, then bowed her head and said, "Yes, I'm willing. I'll do anything I can to help him." Then she got things ready and, together with her five maids, followed the messengers and became David's wife.

43-44. Before this, David had married Michal, Saul's daughter. Then he had married Ahinoam, a woman from Jezreel. Now he married Abigail, Nabal's widow. He was making the same mistake other kings made in those days. But while David was gone, Saul decided to give Michal to another man.

David Spares Saul's Life Again

26 Some people told Saul where David was hiding. So he took 3,000 troops and went to look for David. Saul set up camp along the top of the ridge. David was hiding just south of there and had heard that Saul was after him again. So he sent some scouts to find out where Saul was.

5-6. After they told David, he took a few of his men to see Saul's camp from a distance. He saw Saul and Abner asleep in the middle of the camp with troops all around. Then David said to two of his men, "Which one of you will go with me into the camp tonight to see how close we can get to Saul?" His nephew Abishai said, "I'll go."

7-8. So they slipped past the guards and crept up close to Saul. His spear was stuck in the ground next to him, and nearby was Abner, his general. They were both sound asleep. Abishai whispered, "It'll only take me two seconds to pull up his spear and pin him to the ground."

9-12. David whispered back, "Don't you dare! The Lord will take care of him. We're not touching him. Get his spear and water jug, and let's go." So that's what Abishai did. They slipped past the guards and went back to their camp. It was the Lord who had made Saul and his men fall into a deep sleep.

13-14. By morning David and Abishai had reached the top of the ridge across the valley from Saul. David shouted, "Abner! Wake up! Can you hear me?" Abner got up, looked around, and shouted back, "Who are you? How dare you wake the king!"

15-16. David called back, "Aren't you supposed to protect the king? Why didn't you? Someone came into your camp last night to kill the king, and you didn't even know it! That's not good! You and your men deserve to die for sleeping on duty. Look around you. Where is the king's spear and water jug?"

17-19. By this time Saul was awake. He shouted, "Is that you, David?" David called back, "Yes! Tell me, why are you chasing me? What have I done? If God sent you after me, I must have sinned. If so, He will accept my confession and forgive me. But if men have caused you to chase me without a reason, God will judge them."

20. "If you have to kill me, don't do it so far from home and the Lord's sanctuary. Why should the king kill someone as harmless as a flea? Why should he come after me as if he were hunting a wild bird?"

21-24. Saul called back, "I have done wrong. Come back, David, my son! You spared my life, so I will spare yours." David shouted, "Send one of your young men to come and get your spear and water jug. Last night the Lord delivered you into my hands."

But I spared your life because you're our king. May the Lord spare my life."

25. Saul shouted back, "May the Lord bless you, David. I know you will do great things for God, and you'll succeed." Then David went back into hiding, and Saul returned home.

David Goes to the Philistines

27 After that, David thought to himself, "If I know anything about Saul, he won't give up. One of these days he'll get me. The only thing for me to do is to go across the border to the Philistines and befriend them. At least I'll be safe there, and Saul will be happy."

2-4. Without praying about it, David took his men and went to the city of Gath. The surprised king decided that David must be over his seizures. He was flattered that David would come and ask for asylum. So he let David and his men and their families stay. When Saul heard that David had left the country, he was glad.

5. Before long David realized that he and his men should not be living in such a wicked city. So he went to see the king, thanked him for his kindness, and said, "Why should we be privileged to live with you in this royal city? Please let us move to a smaller town. We'd be more comfortable there."

6-7. The king agreed and let them move with their families to the little town of Ziklag, which at one time had belonged to Israel. So David and his men moved to Ziklag. But the Lord was not pleased with David's lack of faith at this time.

8-9. There were tribes in that part of the country that raided villages on both sides of the border. David and his men would attack the raiders and kill as many as they could. Then they saved the sheep, camels, don-

keys, and other things for themselves, except that David would give part of what they got to the king.

10-11. The king would ask, "Where did you get all this?" David would answer, "I raided the villages along the border that once belonged to the descendants of Moses." The king thought that he meant that he had raided the southern part of Judah, and David let him think so. No one ever told the king differently. This went on for more than a year.

12. Because the king thought that David was raiding villages across the border, he said to himself, "David is making the people of Israel dislike him more and more. Soon he won't be able to go back home, and he'll have to stay here and serve me."

The Philistines Attack Israel

28 It wasn't long before the Philistine kings called up their troops to march against Israel. The king said to David, "I expect you and your men to join us in the attack."

2. David gave a halfhearted answer, saying, "My men are good fighters." The king said, "Good! After we defeat the Israelites, I'll make you my personal bodyguard, and you'll become a permanent member of my court."

Saul and the Witch

3. After Samuel had died, no prophet had messages from the Lord. The people really missed Samuel. When Saul had first become king, he had expelled all witches, spirit mediums, and fortunetellers from the country.

4-5. Now the Philistines were setting up camp near the border to attack Israel. But Saul had been chasing David and had not been paying attention to what the Philistines were

doing. So when he saw their huge army and knew that David and his men were on the other side, his heart sank.

6-7. So he prayed and asked the Lord what to do. But the Lord didn't answer him. He had refused to listen to Samuel, and he had killed the high priest and his sons. Now he was desperate. So he said to two officers, "Go and find a witch that I can talk to. I need help." Soon they were back, saying, "There's one not too far from here."

8-10. After dark Saul disguised himself and with his two officers went to see the witch. Saul said to her, "Contact the spirits for me. Then I'll tell you which one I want to talk to." She suspected that he was Saul. So she said, "The king has forbidden us to do this." Saul said, "I promise that nothing will happen to you."

11-12. So the witch contacted the spirits, and then asked Saul whose spirit he wanted to talk to. Saul answered, "Samuel's." So she went through her ritual, and soon a spirit appeared. She cried out, "You are Saul! The spirit just told me!"

13-14. Saul replied, "I told you that nothing would happen to you. Tell me what you see." She said, "I see many spirits, and one of them is coming closer. Saul asked, 'What does he look like?' She answered, 'I see an old man wrapped in a robe.' Saul cried out, 'That's Samuel!' He fell on his knees and bowed to the ground in front of the spirit.

15. The spirit said, "Why did you bring me back to this land of trouble?" The spirit looked so much like Samuel and talked like him that Saul believed it was Samuel. He answered, "I need your help. The Philistines are ready to attack, and the Lord has not told me what to do, nor has He sent me a prophet. So I came to you."

16-17. The spirit replied, "If the Lord decided not to answer you, why ask me? He wouldn't give me a message for you either. The Lord is doing what He said He would. He is taking the kingdom away from you and giving it to David.

18-19. "You have publicly disobeyed Him. You wanted to be left alone to do your own thing, so that's what God is doing. You need to decide how to fight the Philistines. The Lord will not protect you. They will win. Tomorrow you and your sons will be killed, and your men will surrender."

20. When Saul heard that, he fell face-down to the ground. He looked as if he were dead. He hadn't eaten for some time, and now his feeling of guilt drained out his last bit of energy.

21-22. Finally, when he moved, the woman and the two officers were relieved. She nervously said, "By listening to you I put my life in your hands. So sit up and let me get you something to eat. I don't want anything to happen to you here. You need energy to get back to your troops."

23-25. But Saul just lay there. Then the two officers also urged him to get up and eat something. Slowly he got up and sat down. The woman quickly roasted some meat, baked some bread, and brought it to Saul and his two officers. After they ate, they all felt a little better. They thanked her and left to get back to their troops while it was still dark.

David and the Philistines

29 The Philistine kings had moved their troops to the place at the border where they expected Saul's troops to be. As the kings were grouping their troops, they asked the king of Gath to guard the rear.

3. When the commanders noticed David and his men, they asked, "What are these Hebrews doing here?" The king replied, "That's David. He's come over to our side. I trust him."

4-5. But the commanders were angry and said, "Send these Hebrews back where they came from. Once the fighting begins we don't know what they'll do. What better way for David to get back into Saul's favor than to attack us from the rear. We don't want to take that chance. Isn't this the David the Hebrew women sang about?"

6-7. Then the king went to David and said, "The commanders don't trust you. I trust you and would be happy to have you stay and fight with me. But they don't think it's a good idea. So you'd better go back to Ziklag. We don't want to do anything to displease the commanders and their kings."

8-10. David was relieved but asked, "What have I done to be sent back like this without a good reason? Why can't I come along?" The king said, "I know you're loyal to me. But that's their decision. So tomorrow morning I want you and your man to leave. That's an order!"

11. So David got up early and started the long march back. He knew that the Lord had turned things around. Then the Phillistines marched across the border and the battle began.

David and the Raiders

30 After three long days David and his men finally got back home. They were stunned by what they saw. While they had been gone, a desert tribe had come and raided that part of the country, including their village.

2. The raiders had taken their families and cattle and set their houses on fire. The men knew that the raiders

would sell their women and children as slaves.

3-6. This was almost too much for the men. They broke down and cried until they couldn't cry anymore. David's family was gone too. When the men recovered, they were so mad at David that they were ready to stone him. David felt responsible for the whole thing because it had been his idea to leave Israel. So he turned to the Lord. 7-8. He said to Abiathar, the priest, "Let's ask the Lord what He wants us to do." Then David prayed, "O Lord, please forgive me. I really need You. Should we go after the raiders or not?" The Lord answered, "Yes, go after them, and you'll recover all the families. Not one of the women and children will be missing."

9-10. So David took his men and went after the raiders. After traveling 100 miles to get back home, they marched another fifteen miles. By this time a third of the men just couldn't go on. The rest kept going.

11-12. On the way, they found an Egyptian boy in the wilderness dying from hunger. They gave him some food and water and took him to David. When he revived, they gave him some figs and raisins, and his strength started to come back. He hadn't had anything to eat or drink for three days.

13-14. David asked, "Where are you from and to whom do you belong?" The boy answered, "I'm an Egyptian slave of one of the raiders. We raided the villages in that area, and on the way home we raided and burned your city. After that I got sick, so my master just left me out here to die."

15-16. David said, "Do you know where the raiders are? Could you take us there?" The boy said, "Promise you won't kill me or turn me over to my

master." David promised. So the boy guided them, and they got to the raiders' camp just as the sun was setting. The men were eating and drinking, happy over the huge plunder they had taken.

17-19. When David saw this, he ordered an immediate attack. They fought the raiders from sunset all through the night until late afternoon the next day. All the raiders were killed, except 400 young men on camels who got away. The women and children were safe; not one was harmed or missing. God had protected them.

20-21. David and his men recovered all their flocks and herds and all the animals from the other villages. They couldn't return them, so they kept them for themselves. When the men they had left behind saw them coming, they ran to meet their families. Then David told them all that the Lord had done.

22. The men who had gone with David said, "Don't get the idea that we're going to share our loot with you. Be glad you got your families and animals back."

23-25. David responded, "No! We're not going to be selfish. The Lord was kind to us. So let's be grateful. Those who were too weak to go on and stayed behind to protect our supplies are going to get an equal share." From then on this became a rule in Israel, as it had been under Moses.

26-31. Then David sent some of the animals as presents to the leaders of Judah and told them about his victory over the raiders. He also sent gifts to those who had helped him when he had been hiding in the wilderness and in the mountains.

Saul Gets Killed

31 After that, David and his men started rebuilding their houses and waited for news from the war. Meanwhile, the Philistines attacked Saul with such force that he and his troops turned and ran. Many of them were killed, and their bodies were everywhere.

2-3. Then the Philistines went after Saul and his sons and finally caught up with them and killed them. An archer shot Saul, but he kept going. Soon his strength gave out, and he realized that he was going to die.

4. Saul said to his armor boy, "Take your sword and kill me. I don't want the Philistines to find me still alive and torture me." But the young man refused. So Saul took his sword and fell on it, killing himself.

5-7. When the young man saw that Saul was dead, he pulled out his own sword and killed himself. So Saul, his three sons, and his special guards were all killed. When the Israelites living across the valley saw this, they left their villages and fled. Then the Philistines came and took control over that part of the country.

8. The next day the Philistines went over the battlefield to strip the dead of any valuables they had. That's when they found the bodies of Saul and his three sons lying not far from each other.

9-10. They cut off Saul's head, took his armor, and sent messengers back home with the news. When their priests heard about it, they called the people together to celebrate this victory. They put Saul's head and armor in the temple of their gods and hung his body and the bodies of his sons on the city wall for all to see.

11. When the people of Jabesh

Gilead heard about this disgrace, they remembered how years before Saul had saved them from the wicked Ammonite king.

12-13. So that same night they sent their bravest men across the

Jordan River to get the bodies. They took them off the city wall and brought them back to give them a decent burial. Then they mourned for Saul and his sons for a whole week.

2 Samuel

INTRODUCTION: *Some think that this book was written by Nathan the prophet. It tells the story of David's forty years as king, from about 1010 to 970 B.C. During this time David defeated the armies that threatened the country, and Israel became a great nation. We learn that God uses people who love Him and want to please Him. Also we learn that David sinned, but that he was truly sorry and asked God to help him not to do it again. God forgave him and made David a great king.*

David Learns of Saul's Death

1 Three days after David and his men rescued their families from the raiders, they heard about the war. A young man from Saul's army came into town with torn clothes and with ashes on his head. When they took him to David, he fell on his knees and bowed to the ground.

3-4. David said, "Where did you come from? Do you have news about the war?" The young man replied, "I was in the middle of it, but at the last minute I was able to escape." David asked, "Well, what happened?" The young man answered, "The Israelites lost and ran. Many Israelites were killed, and so were Saul and his three sons."

5-6. David asked, "How do you know that Saul and his sons were killed? Are you sure?" The young man answered, "I was running to get away when I saw Saul using his spear to support himself, and the Philistine chariots were coming in the distance."
7-9. "He called to me, and I replied, 'Yes, Your Majesty.' Then he asked, 'Who are you?' I answered, 'I'm an Amalekite who joined your army, but I'm trying to get out of here.' He said, 'Come and kill me—I'm wounded, and I don't want the Philistines to come and torture me.'"

10. "So I pulled out his sword and killed him. Then I took the gold band from his head and the gold bracelet from his right arm and brought them to you as proof."

11-12. When David heard that, he tore his robe in grief and cried bitterly. He and his men refused to eat until evening as they mourned for Saul and all those who had been killed.

13-14. After they got over the first shock, David again asked the young man, "Where did you say you were from?" He answered, "I'm an Amalekite living in Israel." David said, "Why didn't you refuse to kill Saul when you knew who he was? You're as ruthless and cruel as your tribesmen who raided and burned our city."

15-16. David didn't trust him. So he turned to one of his men and said, "Use your sword and take care of him." Later David looked at the young man's body and said, "You deserved to die for saying 'I killed the king of Israel.'"

David's Song of Sorrow

17-18. Then David wrote a funeral song for Saul and Jonathan. He called it "The Song of the Bow." He taught it to his men so that they could sing it when they got home

and spread it throughout Israel. It goes like this:

19-22. "The pride of Israel has died on the mountainside. The mighty have fallen! Don't tell it as you travel. Don't let our enemies rejoice. May the mountains receive no rain in sorrow for Saul. May the field where his shield lay produce no grain. Jonathan's bow was deadly, and the sword of Saul did its work.

23-24. "Saul and Jonathan were respected and loved. They were together in life and death. They were faster than eagles and stronger than lions. Women of Israel, weep for Saul. He shared with you the spoils of war.

25-27. "How the mighty have fallen! Jonathan is dead on the mountains. I grieve for you, my brother. Our friendship meant so much; you were closer than a brother. The mighty have fallen! Their weapons are silent, abandoned in the field."

David Made King of Judah

2 Not long after David had mourned for Saul and Jonathan, he asked the Lord whether he should go back to Israel or not. The Lord replied, "Yes." David asked, "Where should I go?" The Lord said, "To the city of Hebron." So David and his men took their families and moved to Hebron and the surrounding villages.

4. The leaders of Judah welcomed David back home and made him their king. They told him that men from the city of Jabesh Gilead had rescued the bodies of Saul and Jonathan and given them an honorable burial.

5-7. So David sent this message to the leaders of Jabesh Gilead: "The Lord bless you for your kindness to King Saul. May the Lord be kind and faithful to all of you. I, too, will be kind to you. Continue to be strong and brave.

The tribe of Judah has now made me their king."

Abner and Joab

8-9. After Saul's death, Abner took Saul's remaining son, Ishbosheth, and made him king of the other tribes.

10-11. Ishbosheth was about forty years old and ruled Israel for about two years. Then Abner decided to get rid of David, and bring the tribe of Judah under Saul's son as well. But Judah stayed loyal to David, and he was content to rule his own tribe, which he did for seven years.

12-14. One day Abner took some of his men to the city of Gibeon, not far from Jerusalem. When David's commander, Joab, heard about it, he took some of his men to see Abner. They met by the city well, and Abner said to Joab, "Why don't we let our young men practice hand-to-hand combat?" Joab said, "That's a good idea. Let's do it."

15-17. So they picked twelve young men from each side and matched them up to see which side would win. Before the practice ended, each man had pulled out his sword to fight, and they ended up killing each other. Then the rest of the men fought, and Abner and his men were defeated and ran.

18-22. Joab's young brother Asahel could run as fast as a deer. He decided to catch up with Abner. When Abner saw him coming, he shouted, "Go after someone else! Don't come after me!" But Asahel didn't listen. Abner shouted again, "Stop coming after me, or I'll have to kill you! If I do, your brother Joab will never forgive me!"

23. Asahel kept right on coming. Without stopping, Abner jabbed him so hard in his stomach with the butt end of his spear that he fell and died. Abner kept on running. When Joab

and his men got there and saw Asahel's body, they stopped and stood for a moment in silence.

24-26. Then they kept on going. By evening they caught up with Abner. All of his men except a few from the tribe of Benjamin had scattered. From the top of the hill Abner shouted to Joab and his brother Abishai, "How long will you keep chasing me? We ought to be brothers. Have a little mercy."

27-29. Joab called back, "If you had not asked for mercy, we would have kept going until we got you. After all, it was your suggestion this morning that started it all." So Joab blew the ram's horn and called the fight off. Then Abner and his men crossed the Jordan River and arrived home by noon the next day.

30-32. When Joab got back and counted his men, twenty were missing, including his brother Asahel. But Abner had lost more than 300 men. Then Joab and his men took Asahel's body to Bethlehem and buried it in the family cemetery. After the funeral they marched all night and arrived in Hebron the next morning.

Abner Joins David

3 Now and then fighting broke out between the followers of David and the followers of Saul. David's side kept growing stronger, while Saul's side kept getting weaker.

2-5. David had made the city of Hebron his capital. Following the practice that other kings did in those days, he had many wives. They gave him six sons, some of which were Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah.

6. As the occasional fighting between David's men and Saul's followers continued, Abner's leadership among the tribes became more and more important.

7-8. Ishbosheth didn't like that. When he heard that Abner had taken one of Saul's wives as his own, he confronted him and said, "By doing this, are you trying to say that you'll be the next king?" Abner answered, "How dare you talk to me that way! I've been loyal to your father all my life and even made you king of Israel."

9-11. "I've had it! From now on I'll help David and will turn the whole country over to him." When Ishbosheth saw how angry Abner was, he didn't say another word, because he was afraid of Abner.

12-13. Abner sent a message to David saying, "I know that it's God's will for you to be king of all Israel, so let me help you." David sent this message back: "I'll be happy to renew our friendship. As a pledge of your loyalty, bring my wife Michal back to me."

14-16. He also sent a message to Ishbosheth saying, "Send your sister Michal back to me so that she can become the queen of Judah and later of all Israel." But her new husband didn't want to give her back. So Abner took her and brought her to David.

17-18. Then Abner sent a message to the leaders of Israel saying, "I know you've been wanting to make David king, but I objected. Well, I've changed my mind. Let's go ahead and do it!" Besides, the Lord said He would use David to deliver us from the Philistines."

19. Next, Abner went to talk personally to the leaders of Benjamin, which was the tribe that Saul came from, and convinced them to support David too. Then he went and told David that all the leaders had agreed to make him king.

20-21. He took a number of men with him to see David, who was so glad to see Abner that he ordered a special

banquet. After the banquet Abner said, "Let me go and call the leaders of Israel together and get things ready for your coronation." David agreed and sent Abner away in peace.

Joab Kills Abner

22-23. Just after Abner left, Joab and his men came back from fighting the Amalekites and brought a large amount of plunder with them. Someone told Joab about the banquet that David had given Abner, and that he had accepted Abner's plan to make him king of all Israel.

24-26. After Joab told David about his victory over the Amalekites, he asked, "Why did you let Abner go? For years he's been trying to kill you! How can you trust him? Maybe he's setting a trap for you." Without David's knowing, Joab had already sent runners to tell Abner that David wanted to see him.

27. So Abner and his men came back to Hebron. Joab met him at the city gate and greeted him warmly. He asked him to step to one side to talk to him privately, and then he stabbed him in the stomach. Abner slumped over and died. Joab did this to get even with him for killing his brother, and also to keep him from becoming commander-in-chief.

28-30. When David heard about it, he said, "I'm innocent of the death of Abner, and the Lord knows it." Then he expressed his disapproval of Joab's killing Abner without ever giving Abner a chance to defend himself. But Joab and his brother Abishai felt justified, because the family name had been dishonored by the way Abner had killed their brother Asahel.

David Mourns for Abner

31-32. Then David ordered Joab and

his men to take part in Abner's funeral. They walked in front of the coffin and David behind it. Then they buried Abner.

33-34. David wrote this short song for Abner: "Why should Abner die without a fight? His hands and feet were free to move and defend himself. But he died at the hands of men looking for revenge." Then all the people wept and mourned.

35-37. David didn't eat the rest of the day. He said, "I told the Lord that I would fast in honor of Abner until the sun goes down, and I will keep my word." The people saw that David had a heart for others, and yet he was a man of courage. They also knew that it was not David who had killed Abner.

38-39. David said to his men, "In Abner we lost one of Israel's greatest generals. Even though I'm your king, I can't punish Joab and his brother, because they're my nephews and are highly respected generals. If I did, their troops would rebel, and the country would be divided. I'll have to leave their punishment in the hands of the Lord."

Ishbosheth Is Killed

4 When Ishbosheth heard that Abner had been killed by Joab, he lost courage to rule Israel. He knew that it would be only a matter of time before David would take over.

2-3. Two brothers in his army were from the city of Beeroth, which belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. These two men were captains and highly respected.

4. Ishbosheth was the only one who had a right to the throne—except Jonathan's son Mephibosheth who was crippled. When he was five years old, his babysitter had picked him up to hide him from Saul's enemies.

While running, she had dropped him, and he had broken both ankles.

5-6. One day the two brothers went to see Ishbosheth. They got to his house about noon as he was taking a nap. The maid also had fallen asleep. So they slipped into the house, went to his bedroom, and stabbed him in the stomach while he was sleeping.

7-8. Then they cut off his head, put it in a sack, and walked the rest of the day and all that night to get to Hebron. Early the next day they were taken in to see David. They said, "In this sack is the head of your enemy, Ishbosheth." Then they pulled out the head and showed it to David, hoping for a reward.

9-11. David said, "You will pay for this. Twice the Lord kept me from killing Saul when I could have. When a man came and told me that he had killed Saul, thinking I would reward him, I had him executed. How much more you two deserve to die for killing an innocent man while he's sleeping!"

12. So David ordered both of them executed and had Ishbosheth's head buried next to Abner, his general.

David Becomes King of Israel

5 Then the tribal leaders came to David and said, "We're all descendants of Jacob. When Saul was king, you led many successful campaigns against our enemies. It's been almost twenty years since the Lord chose you to be our king. Now is the time."

3-5. David knew the Lord's will for him. So he agreed and became king of the whole country. He was thirty years old when he first became king. He ruled for forty years, seven years over Judah and thirty-three years over all of Israel.

The City of Jerusalem

6-7. After David became king over all Israel, he and his men set out to take the city of Jerusalem, which was still inhabited by Canaanites. When they got there, the people laughed and said, "You can't take this city! It's built in such a way that even the blind and lame could defend it." But David and his men did take it. They then called it the City of David.

8. This is the way it happened: David said to his men, "The people are the ones who are blind, because they think that no one can take their city. We'll show them." Then Joab and a few of his men crawled inside the water tunnel that led into the city and climbed up a forty-foot shaft. They killed the guards and opened the city gates for David's army to come in.

9-10. So David made the city his capital and named it Jerusalem. He filled in the land to the north of the city and fortified it, and also extended the city to the south. As time went on, David's influence grew among the other nations, because God was with him.

11-12. King Hiram, who ruled the city of Tyre on the Mediterranean coast, sent messengers to David congratulating him on becoming king. He even offered to provide building materials and workmen to build a palace for him. David accepted the king's offer, because he knew that the Lord wanted him to rule Israel from Jerusalem.

13-16. So David moved his family from the city of Hebron to Jerusalem. He had many wives, as kings did in those days, and many sons and daughters. One of the sons born to David after he moved to Jerusalem was Solomon.

David and the Philistines

17. When the Philistines heard that

David and the king of Tyre had become friends, they decided to march against Jerusalem in full force. They were hoping that David would come out to fight and that they would kill him, as they had killed Saul. But David decided to find out what the Lord wanted him to do.

18-19. The Philistines had set up their camp in the Valley of Giants south of Jerusalem. David asked the Lord, "Should I leave the city and go out against them or not?" The Lord answered, "Go out and meet them, and I'll help you."

20-21. So David attacked the Philistines, broke through their defense line, and defeated them so quickly that they left their idols and ran. Then David and his men picked up the idols and burned them.

22-23. But the Philistines didn't give up. They came back to the Valley of Giants with even more troops. David again asked the Lord what to do. The Lord answered, "This time don't go straight at them. Circle around them and attack from where the mulberry bushes and the trees are."

24-25. "When you get there, wait until you hear the sound of marching in the trees; then attack. This means that I'm going against them ahead of you." So that's what David did. He defeated the Philistines and drove them all the way back home.

The Ark Brought to Jerusalem

6 After David defeated the Philistines, he called together thousands of leading men from all over the country to help him bring the ark to Jerusalem. He knew that the light of God's presence often appeared between the two angels standing on the ark.

3. The ark had been at Abinadab's

house, about nine miles from Jerusalem, ever since the Philistines had sent it back. To transport it, David had it put on a new cart pulled by two oxen.

4-5. One of the sons of Abinadab walked in front of the oxen to guide them, and another son walked beside the ark. The priests and musicians were celebrating the occasion with songs, harps, and many other instruments.

6-7. At one place the oxen stumbled, the ark swayed, and Uzzah, the son of Abinadab, reached out to steady it. As soon as he did, the Lord struck him, and he died. He had dared to touch the ark while openly living in sin. Besides, only priests were supposed to touch the sacred ark.

8-11. When David saw this, he became afraid, and so did all the other people. He said, "How can we bring the ark to Jerusalem if this happens to those who touch it?" So he asked Obed, who lived nearby, if they could leave the ark at his house. He agreed, and the Lord blessed him for it. It stayed at his house for about three months.

12. David heard how the Lord was blessing Obed, so he decided to try again to bring the ark to Jerusalem. By now the people realized the sacredness of the ark and the need to obey.

13. This time David ordered the Levites to carry the ark on their shoulders, as the Lord had originally told Moses. The Levites picked it up and carried it a few steps, and nothing happened. So David asked the priests to offer an ox and a sheep in thanksgiving to the Lord.

14-15. Then with music and song they made their way to Jerusalem. David was so happy that he took off his royal robe and jumped for joy. When the watchmen on the walls saw them coming,

they blew the rams' horns and the musicians answered with trumpets. So the ark was brought into Jerusalem with songs of praise to God.

16. As the priests carrying the ark came through the gate, David's wife Michal saw her husband, without his royal robe, jumping for joy. She was embarrassed and later scolded him for doing that.

17-19. The Levites brought the ark into the special tent that David had prepared for it, and set it in place. Then David asked the priests to offer peace offerings and sacrifices of thanksgiving to the Lord. David blessed the people and gave each one a loaf of bread and cakes of dates and raisins. And the people went home rejoicing.

20. When David got home, Michal was mad. She said to him, "The king surely made a fool of himself today by jumping up and down in front of the ark! You should be ashamed of yourself for taking off your royal robe in public!"

21-22. David said, "I did this to show the people that the Lord is our king, and I am only His servant. He put me on the throne, so why should I be ashamed to humble myself in gratitude to Him? I'm willing to humble myself even more. This may offend you, but the people know why I did it, and they respect me for it."

23. Because of Michal's attitude, the Lord did not let her have children of her own.

Nathan the Prophet

7 After David moved into his palace, he called for Nathan the prophet and said to him, "Here I am living in a palace, and the ark of the Lord sits in a tent. That's not right!" Nathan said, "If you're thinking about building a

temple for the Lord, that's a good idea. Go ahead. I'm sure the Lord will bless you for it."

4-7. That night the Lord spoke to Nathan and said, "Tomorrow morning, go back to David and tell him that I don't want him to build a temple for Me. You two thought it was a good idea, but that's not My plan. I've lived in the sanctuary tent since the time of Moses. Did I ever ask the people to build Me a temple?"

8-9. "Also tell him, 'I took you as a shepherd boy and made you king of Israel. I've been with you all these years, protected you, and helped you defeat your enemies. And I will make a name for you among the nations.'

10-11. "'I'm also planning to give My people a permanent place among the nations so they won't be oppressed anymore. They have suffered long enough. So I'm the one who will build a temple, a spiritual house for you and for My people.

12-14. "'After you die, one of your sons will become king, and I will have him build a temple for Me. If he's faithful, this city and My temple will last forever. I will be like a father to him and the nation of Israel will be My son. When the king and the people do wrong, I will discipline them, but I will never stop loving them.

15-16. "'I will not withdraw My support from you as I did from Saul. Your name and your royal house will last forever, and so will your kingdom.'"

17. So Nathan went to see David and told him everything the Lord had said.

David's Prayer

18. David listened to Nathan and then went to worship at the special tent where the ark was. He prayed, "O Lord, who am I and who is my family

that You should choose me to be king? Why would You do everything for me that You have done?

19-21. "As if this were not enough, You have said that through the royal house of David our Deliverer will come. Something like this has never been heard of about kings. What more can I say? You know me better than I know myself. Yet You revealed all this to me because of Your great heart of love.

22-24. "O Lord, no one is like You. No one can do the things You do. No other nation is like Israel, a people You set free from slavery to be special to You. You did awesome things to bring us out of Egypt. You have made us Your very own forever.

25-26. "Lord, do as You wish. My will is Yours. Let my son build a temple for You and may Your name be honored among all the nations of the world. May they say, 'The Mighty God of heaven is the One who is worshiped in Israel!' May my descendants serve You forever.

27-29. "O Lord, You are the God of Israel. You promised to establish my royal house, and that's why I have the courage to pray the way I do. Lord, You are God, there is no other, and what You promise You do. Please bless my descendants and help them to be loyal and obedient so they can enjoy Your presence forever."

David's Victories

8 It wasn't long before the Philistines attacked Israel again. Each time they did, David defeated them. Even the little nation of Moab, which before had been friendly, attacked Israel, and David defeated them also. Then they signed a peace treaty and agreed to pay taxes.

3-4. David also defeated the king of Zobah when he tried to extend his

territory. He captured 1,000 chariots, hundreds of horsemen, and thousands of foot soldiers. David kept 100 chariots and horses, but the rest were used for farm work.

5. When the king of Damascus came to help the king of Zobah, David defeated him, too. He killed thousands of enemy troops, and the rest turned and ran.

6-8. Then the Syrian states signed a peace treaty with David and agreed to pay taxes. The Lord watched over David wherever he went. He brought gold-covered shields, as well as many other items made of bronze, back to Jerusalem.

9-12. When King Toi heard that David had defeated the Syrians, he had his son and a small delegation go to Jerusalem to see David. They brought with them presents of silver and gold and congratulated him on his many victories. David accepted the gifts and dedicated them to the Lord, as he had done with the gifts from the Philistines, the Moabites, the Ammonites, and others.

13-14. By then David had become famous. He also defeated the powerful Edomites, killing thousands of their troops. They too signed a peace treaty with David and agreed to pay taxes. The Lord gave David victory wherever he went.

David's Government

15-17. David ruled over all Israel, and Joab was his commander-in-chief. He put someone in charge of government records and made Abiathar, whose father had given David bread from the sanctuary, one of the high priests. One priest served at the sanctuary in Gibeon, and the other served in Jerusalem, where the ark was.

18. David also had a secretary of

state and a unit of bodyguards under Benaiah. David's sons were princes of the court.

David Cares for Jonathan's Son

9 One day David said to his staff, "Is anyone left from Saul or Jonathan's family? If so, I want to be kind to him." Ziba, one of Saul's former servants went to see David and told him, "Yes, one of Jonathan's sons needs help because he's crippled in both legs."

4-6. David asked, "Where is he?" Ziba told him, and David sent for him immediately. When the young man came, he bowed before David, showing that he accepted him as king. David asked, "Are you Jonathan's son?" Mephibosheth replied, "Yes, I am. And I am your servant."

7-8. David said, "Don't be afraid. I want to be kind to you for the sake of your father. We were very close friends. I will give you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you may eat with me whenever you want to. When Jonathan's son heard that, he bowed and said, "Who am I that you should take such notice of me?"

9-10. Then David called for Ziba and said to him, "I'm giving all the land of Saul to Mephibosheth. I want you and your sons to farm it for him so he and his family can have an income. And I have invited them to move to Jerusalem."

11-13. Ziba said, "I'll be happy to work the farm for him." So Jonathan's son moved with his family to Jerusalem and became part of the royal household.

David's Other Victories

10 When the king of the Ammonites died, his son Hanun took over. David said

to himself, "The father was kind to me, so I will show kindness to his son." So he sent a delegation with a message of sympathy to Hanun at the death of his father.

3. When the men got there, Hanun's princes said to the new king, "Do you think that David sent these men here to express sympathy at the death of your father? He sent them here to see how strong our fortifications are."

4-5. Hanun believed them. So he ordered the guards to arrest the men, shave off their beards on one side of their face, and cut off their robes at the waist in back. Then he sent the delegation home. When David heard what had happened, he sent messengers to meet the men partway and suggested they stay in Jericho until their beards grew back.

6-7. The Ammonites knew that they had insulted David by doing this, and that it would most likely start a war. So they got their troops ready and hired thousands of additional troops from Syria and other countries to help them. When David heard that, he immediately ordered Joab to take his men and attack.

8. Then the Ammonites marched out to meet the Israelites, and the troops from other countries took up their positions not far away. They wanted to be out in the open where they could use their chariots.

9-10. When Joab learned that there were troops in front of him and to one side, he divided his men into two groups. He took charge of one group and put his brother Abishai in charge of the other.

11-12. He said to Abishai, "I'll attack the enemy that's out in the open. If they're too much for me, you send some men to help me. If the Ammonites are too much for you, I'll

send some men to help you. Let's fight with courage. Remember, we're fighting for the God of Israel. May His will be done."

13-14. Then Joab attacked the enemies in the field and defeated them. And when the Ammonites saw what had happened to their allies, they turned and ran. That ended the fight, so Joab and Abishai took their men back to Jerusalem.

15-17. When the Syrians and others realized that Joab and Abishai were taking their men back home, they decided to regroup. Soon they were joined by additional troops. When David heard what was happening, he called up Israel's entire army. Then he crossed the Jordan River, and the battle began.

18. The Syrians saw that they were no match for David, so they all turned and ran. By the time it was over, David had killed hundreds of chariot drivers and thousands of foot soldiers. The Syrian general was severely wounded, and died on the battlefield.

19. When the Syrians saw that they had lost, they made a peace treaty with David and agreed to pay taxes. Then all the enemy forces went back home. Never again did they help the Ammonites fight Israel.

David and Bathsheba

11 The following spring David ordered Joab to attack the Ammonites and finish the war that they had started. David felt confident about his troops. So he decided to stay home and trusted Joab to finish the job.

2. After taking a nap late one afternoon, David went up on the flat roof of the palace to enjoy the evening breeze. As he looked on the houses below, he saw a woman bathing. She was very beautiful.

3. So he sent his servant to find out who she was. "Her name is Bathsheba," the servant reported. "She's the granddaughter of one of your advisers and the wife of Uriah, one of your officers on the front lines."

4-6. Then David sent for her, and she agreed to sleep with him. Not many weeks later she sent a message to him that she was pregnant. David sent word to Joab that he wanted to see Uriah. So Joab pulled Uriah off the front lines and sent him back to Jerusalem.

7-9. David welcomed Uriah and asked him how the war was going. After they talked, David said to him, "Stay home for a few days and get some rest." Uriah thanked the king, but decided to sleep with the troops in the guardroom instead of going home.

10-11. When David heard that Uriah hadn't gone home, he asked to see him again and said, "You've come a long way. Why didn't you go home and sleep in your own bed?" Uriah said, "My men are sleeping in the open field, and I'm their captain. I wouldn't feel right to come home and sleep with my wife while they are out there fighting."

12-13. David complimented him for his loyalty and asked him to rest just one more day. Uriah was eager to get back, but he agreed. That evening David invited Uriah to eat dinner and got him drunk. Even then, Uriah didn't go home, but again slept in the guardroom.

14-17. The next morning David found out that Uriah still hadn't gone home. So he wrote a note to Joab and asked Uriah to deliver it. The letter said, "Put Uriah and his men where the fighting is the worst. Then withdraw your other men." That's what Joab did, and Uriah and some of his men were killed.

18-21. Then Joab sent a message to David about how the war was going and how many troops had been killed. He said to the messenger, "If the king gets upset and asks why I sent the troops so close to the city wall, say to him, 'Uriah, the officer in charge, was also killed.' The king needs to know this, for he will want to mourn for him."

22-24. So the messenger left for Jerusalem. When he got there, he gave the king a report of the war. He said, "We attacked the city and got close to the city gates. But some of our officers and men got killed, including Uriah, the one in charge."

25. David thanked him and said, "Go back tomorrow and tell Joab that in war men do get killed, so he shouldn't be discouraged. Keep up the pressure and take the city as soon as possible."

26-27. When Bathsheba heard that her husband had been killed, she mourned for him a long time. Then David brought her to the palace and married her. After some months she gave birth to a son. The Lord was very unhappy with David.

Nathan's Parable

12 Then the Lord gave Nathan the prophet a parable and told him to go and share it with David. So Nathan went to David and said, "Your Majesty, two men were living in the same town. One was rich and the other poor.

2-3. "The rich man had many sheep and cattle, but the poor man had only one little lamb. He carefully raised it, and it became a real family pet. He even gave it food from his own table and held it in his arms as if it were his own daughter.

4. "One day the rich man had a special visitor at his house. He didn't

want to kill one of his own sheep for meat. So he sent his servants to the poor man's house to take his lamb. And that's what they did."

5-6. Before Nathan even finished telling the parable, David was furious. He stood up and said, "As surely as the Lord lives, that man deserves to die! I will make him pay the poor man four sheep for the one he took!"

7-8. After David sat back down, still angry over the whole thing, Nathan said to him, "You are the rich man! This is what the Lord says: 'I made you king of Israel, protected you from Saul, and gave you a kingdom. Soon you had several wives and lots of sons and daughters.

9-10. "'But you used your authority as king to take another man's wife, then had him killed in battle to cover it up. By your example you have said that My commandments don't mean anything. So now bloodshed will come into your family. What you did, your sons now think they can do.

11-12. "'You will live to see the consequences of your example. These same things will happen in your family, and it will be done openly and boldly for all Israel to see.'"

13. David was stunned. With trembling lips he admitted what he had done and said, "I have sinned a great sin against Uriah and his wife, Bathsheba, but most of all I have sinned against the Lord. I deserve to die." After David finished crying, Nathan said, "The Lord has heard your admission of guilt. You will not die, as you deserve.

14. "But because you went against God's commandments and gave the people an excuse to do the same, God will let your newborn son get sick and die. This will be more painful to you than your own death."

David's Baby Dies

15-17. No sooner had Nathan left the palace than the baby got sick. David fasted and prayed that he would get well. That night David threw himself on the ground, asked the Lord for forgiveness, and pleaded with Him to spare his little son's life. His servants tried to get him to come and eat with them, but he refused.

18-19. After a week the baby died. David's servants were afraid to tell him. They said, "If he was so sad when the baby was sick, how will he feel when he hears that it died?" When David heard them whispering, he knew that something had happened. So he asked, "Did the baby die?" They answered, "Yes."

20-21. Then David got up and washed, combed his hair, changed clothes, and went to the sanctuary to worship. When he came back, he asked for something to eat. His servants were puzzled. They said, "When the baby was alive, you fasted and prayed. Now that it's dead, you sit up and eat."

22-23. David replied, "When my little son was alive, I fasted and prayed that the Lord would heal him. But now that he's dead, there's nothing more I can do for him. Someday I will join him in death, but he won't be coming back to me in this life."

Solomon Is Born

24-25. Not long afterward Bathsheba got pregnant again and gave birth to another son. David named him Solomon. The Lord still loved David and also little Solomon. The Lord sent Nathan to tell David to give his little son the middle name of Jedidiah, meaning Loved by the Lord.

David and the Ammonites

26-28. All during this time Joab and his

men continued fighting the Ammonites, trying to take their capital. Joab sent word to David that he had taken the city's water supply and that the king should come and take part in the final battle. He wanted David to get the credit for taking the city.

29-31. So David gathered the men at home, went to the front lines, attacked the city, and took it. As a sign of victory, he took the golden crown off the head of their idol god and put it on his own head. It was very heavy, weighing about seventy-five pounds. David took many other things from the Ammonites and then made them work for Israel.

Trouble in the Family

13 Eventually four of David's sons died, which was equal to the sentence he had pronounced against the rich man in the parable who took the poor man's sheep. It began when Amnon mistreated his sister Tamar. He pretended to be sick and asked her to come and make a special meal for him.

7-14. David urged her to do it, hoping it would help Amnon feel better. So she went to his room and on a little portable stove made a meal that Amnon liked. But he refused to eat. Then he told everyone to leave, and he forced Tamar to sleep with him, for he was stronger than she was.

15-19. Then Amnon told her to get up and get out. She refused, saying, "First you force me to sleep with you, and now you're forcing me to leave. That makes two wrongs!" But he called his personal servant and told him to take her away and lock the door. Once outside, Tamar tore her dress as a sign of grief and went home crying.

20. When her brother Absalom saw her crying, he asked, "What hap-

pened?" She told him everything. Absalom said, "Let's not tell anyone, since he's our brother. You can come and live with me." So that's what Tamar did. She lived with her brother the rest of her life.

21-22. When David heard about it, he was furious. But he felt he couldn't do anything, because of his own sin with Bathsheba. Absalom too was angry with Amnon, but never said anything to him about it.

Absalom Kills His Brother

23-25. Two years later Absalom invited all his brothers to a celebration of the wool harvest north of the city. He also invited his father and all his officials. David responded, "Thank you, son, but if we all go, it would be too much for you."

26-27. Absalom knew this would happen. So he asked, "If you and your officials can't come, then let all my brothers go." David hesitated, but finally agreed.

28-29. After all the brothers had gotten there and were celebrating, Absalom said to his servants, "When Amnon gets drunk, go over and kill him. Don't be afraid. Do as I tell you. I'll take the responsibility for it." His servants watched Amnon, and at the right time they went over and killed him. Then the other brothers got on their mules and galloped away.

30-33. Back in Jerusalem word spread that Absalom had killed all his brothers. When David heard that, he tore his royal robe, threw himself on the floor, and lay there stunned. Then Jonadab, David's nephew, arrived and said, "Your Majesty, only Amnon was killed. Absalom had been planning this for a long time because of what Amnon did to Tamar."

34-36. Then a watchman shouted, "A

group of men on mules are riding as fast as they can toward Jerusalem. David's nephew said to the king, "These are the king's sons, just as I told you." Soon the brothers came rushing into the palace and told their father what had happened. Then the king and all his officials mourned the death of Amnon.

37-39. Meanwhile, Absalom hurried to his mother's father, on the other side of Jordan. He stayed there for three years. Finally David stopped mourning and accepted the fact that Amnon was dead. When David got over having to punish Absalom, he longed for him to come home.

Absalom Comes Home

14 Joab knew how much David missed Absalom. So he sent for a woman with special talents as an actress and said to her, "I want you to put on mourning clothes and go to see the king." Then he told her what to say.

4-6. She agreed, and went to see the king. She fell on her knees and pleaded, "Your Majesty, please help me!" He asked, "What's the problem?" She answered, "I'm a poor widow. My husband died some time ago. I had two sons to look after me, but they got into a fight, and one killed the other one."

7. Now they want to arrest my remaining son and have him tried for murder. If he's condemned and executed, they will take my property also. And if that happens, it will be the end of the family name, and the last spark of hope I have in life will go out."

8-9. David said, "By the authority I have as king, I'll pardon your son. Go home and tell them that." The woman replied, "But if the king overrides the law, the people will hold you responsible for letting a crime

go unpunished. Let me die in my son's place."

10-11. David responded, "If anyone questions my decision, let him come to see me." Then the woman asked if the king would promise that no one would take the law into his own hands and kill her son. David promised.

12-14. The woman thanked the king and requested, "Your Majesty, may I say one more thing?" David answered, "Speak up." She said, "Why are you so quick to forgive my son, but not your own son? All of us have to die sometime, but God respects each life and has provided a way to bring us back to life."

15-17. "I came to see the king on behalf of my son, because that was my last chance to save him and to keep our property. You have saved my son's life and given us hope. The king is like an angel. May the God of Israel always be with you."

18-20. David listened patiently, then said, "Let me ask you a question, and I want you to tell me the truth." The woman answered, "I will." Then the king asked, "Did Joab put you up to this?" The woman replied, "The king is very wise. Yes, it was Joab. He wants to see you and Absalom together again. My king has the insight of an angel."

21-23. Then David dismissed the woman and sent for Joab. When he came, David said, "I listened to the woman you sent and got your message. So go and get Absalom and bring him back home." Joab bowed before the king, then thanked him for being merciful and for granting his request. Then he went and brought Absalom back home.

24. But the king and his officials did not want to see Absalom, nor did they want him to set foot in the palace

ever again. So he went to live in his own house in another part of the city.

David Forgives Absalom

25-27. Of all of David's sons, Absalom was the most handsome. He was tall and well built, and walked with the bearing of a king. His hair was beautiful, long and thick. When he had it cut, the cuttings would weigh more than five pounds. He had three sons and a daughter named Tamar, named after his sister. She also grew up to be a very beautiful young woman.

28. For the next two years Absalom played on the sympathy of the people who admired his courage for having dealt with his brother.

29-30. One day Absalom sent for Joab to see if he would ask David to let him come back to the palace. But Joab didn't come. So Absalom told his servants to set Joab's field of barley on fire. And they did.

31-32. Then Joab went to see Absalom and demanded, "Why did you do such a thing?" Absalom replied, "That's the only way I could get your attention. I want you to go to my father and ask him why he brought me home if I can't come to the palace. If I'm still held guilty of murder, then let me die."

33. Joab agreed and went to see David. He told him what Absalom had said. So David sent for his son, and Absalom came and bowed in front of the king as everyone did. David was glad to see him, threw his arms around him, and welcomed him to the palace.

Absalom's Rebellion

15 During the next two years Absalom rode through the city in a chariot with men running ahead of him announcing his coming. Early in the morning he

would stand near the city gate to talk to those coming to see the king. He would listen to them and say, "You have a good case. If I were judge, I could settle it now and see that justice is done."

5-6. The men would bow before Absalom, honoring him as the king's son, and ask him for help. He would put his hands on their shoulders and greet them as brothers. He did this no matter what tribe they belonged to. Thus he stole the hearts of the people.

7-8. All this took place after David let Absalom come back home. Then Absalom went to see the king and said, "Father, I would like to go to Hebron, where you first became king and where I was born. I told the Lord that if He brought me home I would go to the city where I was born and thank Him for what He has done."

9-10. David said, "Sure, you can go." So Absalom went. From there he sent men to all the tribes to tell those who favored him that he planned to become king. He said, "Once you hear the ram's horn, shout, 'Absalom is king!'"

11-12. Absalom had invited 200 important men from Jerusalem to this feast of thanksgiving, and they innocently went along. He had also invited Bathsheba's grandfather, one of the king's advisers who was still angry with David. It was under his influence that the plot against David had really taken hold.

David Leaves Jerusalem

13. A messenger came running to David, saying, "Your Majesty, your son Absalom has proclaimed himself king, and men from all over the country have pledged their loyalty to him!"

14. David acted quickly. He called his officials together and said, "Come, let's get out of the city! Absalom will

attack before we can get ready to defend ourselves."

15-18. They all agreed. So except for a few women that he asked to look after the palace, the king, his family, and all his officials left the city. Before crossing the valley outside Jerusalem, David stopped and let his bodyguards and the special forces go ahead.

19-20. But first he asked the commander of the special forces, "Why are you and your troops coming along? Why don't you stay to serve the new king? You men haven't lived in Israel that many years. So why get involved in our politics? Go back, and the Lord bless you."

21-22. The officer said, "As long as the king lives, we will go wherever he goes and protect him with our lives." David was testing their loyalty. Then he said, "If that's your decision, come along and march ahead of us." So that's what they did.

23. The people cried when they saw David and his family pass by. Finally, after crossing the valley, the group headed east toward the Jordan River. Their plan was to cross it and then head north into the woods.

24. The two high priests had brought the ark from Jerusalem and had offered sacrifices until all the people who wanted to follow David had left the city.

25-29. Then David said to the high priests, "Why don't you take the ark back into the city? If the Lord wants me to continue as king, He'll bring me back. If not, let Him do to me whatever He thinks is best. Take your sons with you and see what's going on. I'll wait here until I hear from you." So that's what they did.

30-31. As David walked up the Mount of Olives, he went barefoot, covered his head, and cried. The people cried

too. When he heard that Bathsheba's grandfather had joined Absalom, he prayed, "Lord, please turn his advice into foolishness."

32-34. At the top of the Mount of Olives David's former adviser, Hushai, met him. He was wearing a torn robe and had ashes on his head. David greeted him and said, "You're one of my most trusted friends. Do you think you could go back to Jerusalem to offer your services to Absalom and give him advice that would help me?"

35-37. "I've already sent the two high priests and their sons back. Tell them whatever you find out, and their sons will come and tell me." Hushai agreed, cleaned up, and got back to Jerusalem just as Absalom was coming in.

David's Enemies

16 On the other side of the Mount of Olives, Saul's former servant, Ziba, came to meet David. He had several donkeys loaded with sacks of bread, raisins, figs, and a large container of grape juice. David asked, "What's all this?" Ziba replied, "The donkeys are for you and your family, and the bread and fruit is for everyone."

3. The king thanked him and asked, "How is Jonathan's crippled son doing?" Ziba lied and said, "He's decided to stay in Jerusalem, because he thinks the people will turn against Absalom and make him king."

4. David said, "Because of that, I'm taking Saul's property away from him and giving it to you." Ziba bowed before the king and said, "May I always serve you and find favor in your eyes."

5-8. Along the way a man named Shimei, a relative of Saul's, came and cursed David and threw stones at him. He shouted, "Get out of here, you murderer! You're nothing but a

bloodthirsty old man, the son of a devil! The Lord is punishing you for killing Saul's family. So He's taking the kingdom away from you and giving it to Absalom."

9-10. Abishai said to David, "Let me go over and cut off this man's head for cursing you like that!" David said, "You and your brother, Joab, are the bravest men I know, but we don't always think the same. The Lord may have let this happen for a reason."

11-12. "My own son is out to kill me. So I'm not surprised that one of Saul's relatives would curse me. Leave him alone. I'd rather let the Lord take care of him. If I have mercy on him, maybe God will have mercy on me."

13-14. David and his officials continued on their way, and Shimei walked on the other side of the road, cursing and throwing stones at David. By the time they got to the Jordan, they were exhausted. So they stopped, had something to eat, and rested awhile.

Jerusalem

15-17. Meanwhile Absalom and his men had arrived in Jerusalem and found David and his officials gone. Then Hushai, David's friend, went to the palace and welcomed Absalom. He said, "Long live the king!" Absalom said, "Is this how you show your loyalty to David—by being the first one to welcome me?"

18-19. Hushai said, "I give my support to the king chosen by the people and the tribal leaders. He's the one I will serve. Besides, if I served your father, why shouldn't I serve his son?"

20. This pleased Absalom, and he made Hushai one of his advisers. Then he turned to Bathsheba's grandfather, Ahithophel, and said, "Now that we've taken Jerusalem without a fight, what do you advise that we do next?"

21. He replied, "Take the ten women your father left behind to take care of the palace up on the flat roof and announce to the crowd below that these women are now yours. This will be a sign to the people that you're the new king."

22-23. So Absalom did what Ahithophel said. In those days people listened to Ahithophel as if he were speaking for God. That's how much both David and Absalom valued his advice.

Two Different Suggestions

17 Then Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Why don't you let me take 12,000 men of your best troops and go after David tonight? I want to get even with him for what he did to my granddaughter and Uriah. You need to stay here for your own safety.

2. "I'll launch a surprise attack when David and his men are exhausted. They'll see that they're outnumbered, and turn and run. Then I'll go after David himself.

3-4. "After he's dead, his troops will come back to Jerusalem and pledge their loyalty to you. So the death of one man will give you the support of many. I will not harm David's family or his officials." Absalom and his men liked the idea and agreed.

5-6. Then Absalom said, "Just a minute. Before we do that, let's see what Hushai has to say. When Hushai came, Absalom told him the plan they had in mind and asked what he thought about it.

7-8. Hushai said, "That's not a good plan. You know the awesome fighters your father and his men are. They're not going to spend the night out in a field where they can be attacked.

9-10. "They're probably hiding in a cave, as they did when Saul was after them. They'll catch your men off

guard, as they've done so many times with the Philistines. As soon as word gets back that David is winning, even your bravest men will run, because they know what your father and his men can do.

11-13. "My advice is to call up every man of military age in the whole country. And as the new king, you ought to personally lead them into battle. This will let you hunt David and his men down, no matter where they are. If they make it to some city, you'll have enough men to take ropes and pull the whole city off the mountain."

14. Absalom and his men liked Hushai's plan better because it guaranteed success. So God helped David by having Absalom reject Ahithophel's plan.

Hushai Warns David

15-16. Then Hushai went to the two high priests and told them what had happened. He said, "Absalom could still change his mind. So send a message to David and tell him to cross the Jordan as quickly as he can and head north into the mountains. If he camps by the Jordan River for the night, he could be dead by morning."

17. Now, the two sons of the high priests had stayed outside of Jerusalem by a well to mingle with the people so as not to cause suspicion. Their fathers sent a servant girl to give them the message.

18-19. But an older boy saw them talking off by themselves and became suspicious and ran to tell Absalom. The two sons noticed that and left. They got partway and decided to stop at the house of a friend and hide in his well. The man's wife put a covering over the well and scattered some old grain on it to make it look as if it had been there a long time.

20. When Absalom's men came looking for them, they asked the woman if she had seen the young men. She said, "I saw them cross the brook over there." Absalom's men looked everywhere for them. When they couldn't find them, they decided to go back to Jerusalem.

21-22. Then the two young men climbed out of the well and headed for David's camp. When they got there, they told him to cross the Jordan right away, because Absalom might attack that night. So David and his men did.

23. When Bathsheba's grandfather saw that his plan had been rejected, he went back home, set things in order, and hanged himself. The next day they buried him.

24-26. Meanwhile David and his men crossed the Jordan and were heading north. By now Absalom had decided not to wait. So he made Amasa, one of David's former officers, his general. Amasa had left David and joined Absalom at the first sign of rebellion. Then he and Absalom took their men, crossed the Jordan River, and headed north after David.

27-29. By this time David and his men were some distance ahead of Absalom. When they got to one of the little cities along the way, three men came to meet them with blankets, bowls, pots, wheat, flour, beans, lentils, honey, cheese, and sheep. They said, "We knew that you'd be hungry after coming all this way."

Absalom Defeated

18 Then David divided his men into three groups. He put Joab over one group, Abishai over another, and Ittai over the third one. He told them that he would personally lead them into battle.

3. But his men said, "No! Absalom will go after whichever group you're with. It's better for you to stay; then he'll have to fight all three groups. You can send us extra men if we need them."

4-5. David said, "I'll do whatever you think best." So he stood at the city gate as the troops marched by, going into battle. He called out to his officers and men, "Be kind to Absalom for my sake."

6-8. Then David's men fought Absalom's men in the forest and defeated them. The fighting spread throughout that whole area, and thousands of Absalom's men were killed.

9. Absalom rode as fast as he could to get away from David's men. As he looked back to see how close they were, his mule ran under a huge oak tree, and Absalom's head slammed into the fork of two big branches. He hung there as his mule ran out from under him. He was unconscious, with his long hair entangled in the branches.

10-11. One of David's men saw what had happened. He was afraid to do anything to Absalom because of what the king had said. So he ran and told Joab about it. Joab said, "What! You saw Absalom caught in a tree and didn't kill him? I would have given you ten pieces of silver and a warrior's belt!"

12-13. The man said, "Even if you had offered me 1,000 pieces of silver, I would not have touched Absalom, because of what the king said. If I had killed Absalom, the king could have demanded my head. Sooner or later he would have found out who did it."

14-15. Joab said, "Let's not waste time! Where is he?" They ran to where Absalom was and found him still hanging there unconscious but alive. So Joab took three short spears and thrust them into Absalom's chest. His

men took the body down and made sure that Absalom was dead.

16-17. Then Joab blew the ram's horn, and the fighting stopped. His men took the body, threw it into a nearby pit, and covered it with a pile of stones. And Absalom's troops went back home.

18. During his short time as king, Absalom had built a big monument to himself in the Valley of the Kings. He said to himself, "I have no son to carry on my name. This way people won't forget me."

19-20. Now, the son of one of the high priests was eager to take the news to the king. But Joab said, "No, because the son of the high priest should not be a carrier of bad news. This will be a day of mourning, not a day of celebration."

21-23. Then Joab told his servant to take the news to the king, and the man took off running. Then the high priest's son said, "At least let me go and carry the good news to the king." Joab said, "Are you looking for some reward? Well, go ahead." So he took off running and went the longer but easier way and outran Joab's servant.

24-25. David was waiting at the gate for some news from the front. When the watchman on the wall saw a runner, he called to the king, "I see a runner coming!" David said, "He's got good news. No one runs with bad news."

26-27. Soon the watchman saw another runner and called to the king, "I see another runner in the distance!" David said, "That looks like more good news." The watchman said, "The first one looks like the son of one of the high priests!" David said, "He's a good man. I'm sure he has good news."

28-30. The runner called out to David, "All is well!" Then he bowed and said, "Praise the Lord! He has given you the

victory!" David said, "But how is Absalom?" He said, "I saw a group of soldiers around Absalom, but I don't know what happened next." David said, "Stay here; let's see what the other runner says."

31-32. Then Joab's servant came running, bowed, and said, "The Lord has saved the king from all those who rebelled." David said, "But what about Absalom?" The servant said, "May all the enemies of my king be as he is."

33. David knew what he meant. He was overcome with grief. Then he went to his room and cried out, "O Absalom, my son! If only I could have died in your place!"

David and Joab

19 Then someone told Joab that the king was really shaken by the death of his son and couldn't stop crying. When the troops got word about Absalom's death and the king's response, they mourned and came through the gate like men who had been defeated. They could hear the king crying out, "My son, my son!"

5-6. So Joab went to see David and said to him, "We have just risked our lives for you and have received no thanks or words of appreciation. With all your crying you make us feel guilty. You make it sound as though you would be happier if all of us had been killed in place of Absalom."

7. "So stop crying and show some gratitude for what your men have done. If you don't, I swear that by tonight we will all be gone and leave you by yourself. That'll be worse than anything that's ever happened to you."

8. David realized that Joab was right. He wiped away his tears and went and stood on the platform by the gate. The troops lined up outside the

wall and marched back into the city as the king proudly waved to them, welcoming them back from victory.

David Returns to Jerusalem

9-10. In Jerusalem some had revolted against David, some were indifferent, and others had supported him. Those who had supported him said, "He's the one who saved us from the Philistines. But when Absalom claimed the throne, he left. Now that Absalom is dead, let's bring David back."

11-13. When David heard about the division, he sent a message to the two high priests to ask the leaders of Judah why they were hesitating to have him come back. He also promised to make Absalom's general his commander-in-chief in place of Joab, because Joab had disobeyed and killed Absalom.

14-15. The priests did what David said, and it touched the hearts of the leaders. So they sent a message to David to hurry and come back. By the time David got to the Jordan River, the leaders of Judah were there to welcome him.

16-17. Shimei, who had cursed David, quickly switched sides and welcomed him. A thousand men from the tribe of Benjamin were there. And Ziba, the former servant of Saul, and his sons and servants, were there too. They all welcomed David back.

18-21. The man who had cursed David fell at his feet and asked forgiveness. He said, "I know I did wrong, but I want to welcome you back." Abishai said to David, "This is the fellow who cursed you. Let me go and kill him."

22-23. David said, "You and your brother Joab are the bravest men I know, but you don't think as I do. This is not the time to execute people. It's a time for mercy and forgiveness. I'm

still king, and no one will be killed." Then David forgave the man and promised he would not be killed.

24-25. Jonathan's crippled son was also there. He had not trimmed his beard or washed his clothes since David left. When he greeted Mephibosheth, David asked, "Why didn't you come with me? Why did you stay behind in Jerusalem? Did you think the people would make you king?"

26-28. Mephibosheth answered, "I had asked Ziba to saddle my donkey so I could go with you, but he left without me. Then I heard that he told you I was hoping to become king. That was not true. All of my grandfather's descendants deserve to die for the way they treated you. But you have taken care of me. I have no right to ask for more mercy."

29-30. David replied, "Don't say any more. Ziba brought us food and gave us donkeys when we needed help. I told him he could have your grandfather's property, but I'm giving half of it back to you." Mephibosheth said, "He can have all of it! All that matters is that you're safely back home." But David kept his word.

31-33. The men who had helped David with blankets and food were there too. One was a man in his eighties. David said to him, "Come with me to Jerusalem, and I'll take care of you in your old age."

34-37. Barsilli answered, "I don't have that many more years to live. Why should I move to Jerusalem? My mind is not as sharp as it used to be, and I can hardly hear. I'll go with you part-way, and then come back. I don't need a reward. When I die, I'd rather be buried next to my parents. But let my son take my place if he wants to."

38-40. David said, "I'll be happy to do for him what I would have done for

you." Then David crossed the Jordan, said goodbye to the old man along the way, and took his son Chimham with him to Jerusalem.

Arguments Over David

41-42. When David got to Jerusalem, the leaders of the other tribes came to meet the king. They said to him, "Why were the men of Judah in such a hurry to welcome you back without asking us?" The leaders of Judah said, "Because he belongs to our tribe, we thought we should be the first to welcome him. Why are you so mad?"

43. The men of Israel said, "Just remember that ten tribes have a much larger claim on him than you and the little tribe of Benjamin. So don't look down on us. It was our idea to bring him back in the first place." But the leaders of Judah would not give up their right to the first claim on David.

Troubles

20 While the men of Judah and Israel were arguing over David, a man named Sheba suddenly blew the ram's horn and shouted, "Why should we fight over David? Let the tribe of Judah have him!" So the men of Israel turned away from David and went back home. But the men of Judah stayed with David and took him back to Jerusalem.

3. When David got there, the first thing he did was to give the ten women that Absalom had made his own a place to live outside the palace. This showed that he had rejected Absalom's actions as king.

4-5. Then David called in Amasa and said, "I want you to call together all the fighting men of Judah to meet me here the day after tomorrow. I want you to be here too." But Amasa took longer than planned.

6-7. In the meantime, David said to Abishai, "Sheba will cause more rebellion than Absalom ever did unless we stop him. You need to take our special forces and go after him." So Abishai left and asked his brother Joab to come along.

8-9. Just across the border in Benjamin they met Amasa and his men. They wondered what he was doing there, since he was supposed to be in Judah. Joab went over to greet him and loosened his belt that held a dagger so that it fell out. He bent over to pick it up with his left hand so he could shake hands with Amasa.

10-11. Amasa didn't think about the dagger in Joab's left hand. Joab pulled him closer to greet him as a brother, stabbed him, and ripped open his stomach. Amasa slumped over and died. Then his men followed Joab.

12-13. When one of the officers noticed that the troops were slowing down to look at Amasa's body, he dragged it into the field and covered it up. Then the men moved on.

14-15. In the meantime, Sheba had gone to all the tribes to gain support for his rebellion against David. At one small city, he and his men decided to stop and rest. It was there that Abishai and Joab caught up with him. They started to build a ramp against the wall so that they could get into the city to get Sheba.

16-19. A woman appeared at the top of the wall and called down, "Listen! I want to talk to Joab!" When he came, she asked, "Are you Joab?" He answered, "Yes, I am." She said, "Listen to me. We're a friendly people. For years people have come to our little city for help. Why would you destroy a peaceful people who love the Lord?"

20-21. Joab listened, then said, "The last thing we want to do is to hurt

you. But there's a man hiding in your city named Sheba. He's from the tribe of Benjamin and is stirring up people against David. Let us have him, and we'll be on our way." The woman said, "Wait there, and we'll give you his head."

22. She went and talked to the city fathers. They grabbed Sheba, cut off his head, and threw it down to Joab. Then Joab blew the ram's horn and ordered his men to break up and go home. He and Abishai and their men went back to Jerusalem.

David's Officials

23-26. Joab was still David's overall general, and Benaiah was still in charge of the king's bodyguards. Others were in charge of government records. Sheva served as David's royal secretary, and Ira was the king's personal ambassador and adviser. The two high priests were still in charge of the sanctuary and the ark.

David and the People of Gibeon

21 Near the close of David's reign there was a severe drought. It lasted for three years. The Lord said to David, "I'm withholding rain because the country is guilty of murder. Saul killed almost all the people living in Gibeon, a city that had made a peace treaty with Joshua years ago."

24. So David called for the leaders who were left and said to them, "What can I do to make things right for the crime that Saul committed against you?" They said, "We're not asking to be paid for the loss of our people or property. We're not asking that the same number of Israelites be killed." David said, "Then what can we do for you?"

5-6. They said, "Saul broke the treaty

that our people made with Joshua, and wanted to kill all of us. He almost succeeded. The few who are left are scattered everywhere. So all we're asking is that seven descendants of Saul's be arrested and executed for what he did to us. Maybe this will stop the drought." David agreed.

7-10. So he had seven rebellious descendants of Saul arrested and handed over to the Gibeonites. They took them to a hill near Saul's hometown, executed them, and left the bodies there. Then Rizpah, the mother of two of them, stayed by the bodies day and night to keep the vultures away.

11-12. When David heard about this, his heart went out to her. So he decided to give them a decent burial. But first he ordered the bodies of Saul and Jonathan dug up and brought back from the city of Jabesh Gilead so that they could be buried in their hometown.

13-14. Then David ordered that the bodies of the seven who had been executed by the Gibeonites be brought back and buried next to Saul. After that, God answered the people's prayers. The rains came, and the drought ended.

The Philistine Giants

15-16. Once again war broke out between the Philistines and Israel. David led his men into battle, but while in hand-to-hand combat he became exhausted. When one of the Philistine giants realized that, he went after David. He was huge. The tip of his spear was made of bronze, and his new sword was as sharp as a razor.

17. When Abishai saw the giant going after David, he attacked the giant with great fury. He struck him down with one blow and killed him. Then the officers said to David, "You're not going

into battle again. You're too important. You're the light of Israel!" Then David's men attacked the Philistines and defeated them.

18-20. Not long afterward there was another battle with more Philistine giants. Then there was another battle, and still another. In one of them there was the biggest giant ever. He had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot.

21-22. When he challenged Israel to a fight, David's nephew Jonathan accepted the challenge and killed him. Four of these giants had come from Goliath's city, and all four were killed by David's men.

David's Victory Song

22 This is one of the songs that David wrote and sang to the Lord after he was saved from his enemies: "The Lord is my rock, my fortress, my defense. He is my overhanging rock under which I hide. He is my strength and salvation. He is the one who saved me from my enemies. He alone is worthy of praise.
5-7. "When death was all around me and the waves of destruction were about to roll over me, I cried to the Lord for help. When the grave reached out to pull me in, He heard me and rescued me.

8-11. "Then the earth shook and the heavens thundered. The Lord was angry with my enemies. Smoke and fire came out of the earth, and hail came down from the sky. The Lord stepped into His heavenly chariot, and, surrounded by angels, He rode down to earth on the wings of the wind.

12-16. "Darkness covered Him, and clouds of rain filled the sky. Lightning flashed across the heavens, and thunder filled the air. The Lord had come to defend me. He sent my enemies

running. The Lord is powerful. At His rebuke the bottom of the sea was uncovered and the earth was laid bare.

17-20. "He reached down from the sky and rescued me. My enemies pressed in to kill me. They were too strong for me. Suddenly there was space around me. He had saved me from death.

21-25. "The Lord helped me because I have tried to do what's right. He rewarded me. I have not turned away from the Lord to do evil. I know His commandments by heart and have not broken His law. He knows that I am blameless. He has rewarded me according to my innocence.

26-27. "The Lord stands by those who stand by Him. He is good to those who are good. But He is against the wicked. The Lord helps those who are humble, and humbles those who are proud.

28-31. "Lord, You are my lamp. You turn darkness into light. With You beside me I can attack a whole army. The ways of the Lord are perfect. The words of the Lord are true. He is a mighty shield to all those who need protection.

32-35. "Who is the Lord? Who is the Mighty Rock? God alone is our refuge and strength. He makes my path safe. He helps me run like a deer and stand on the top of the mountain. He gives me strength to bend the strongest bow.

36-37. "Lord, You protected me with salvation's shield. Your kindness made me great. You made my way clear so that I did not stumble and fall into the hands of my enemies.

38-41. "I went after them and did not give up until they fell at my feet. Lord, You gave me the strength to do battle. You caused my enemies to bow before me. They were out to get me.

42-43. "They cried to their gods for help, but no one came to save them.

They called to the God of heaven, but He did not answer them. I struck them down, and they fell to the ground. I stepped on their bodies as I charged into battle.

44-46. "Lord, You delivered me from attacks by my own people. You kept me as king in the sight of nations. People I don't even know are willing to serve me. Foreigners bow before me and are ready to obey. My enemies lose their courage and tremble in their hideouts.

47-49. "The Lord lives! Praise the Rock of our salvation! Let us exalt the Lord. He is the one who gives us the victory. He has saved me from my enemies. He put me over those who hated me. He protected me from the hands of violent and angry men.

50-51. "I will praise the Lord. I will praise His name. The Lord has given the king great victories. He is faithful to the one He has chosen. He showers the royal house of David with unspeakable love."

David's Last Words

23 David was not only king but was also known as the sweet singer of Israel because he composed many songs. This is his last song: "The Spirit of the Lord has spoken to me and His message is in my mouth.

3-4. "The God of Israel spoke and the Rock of Israel said to me, 'The one who rules must be just and rule with respect for God. Then he will be like the light that floods the earth at dawn. He will be as sunshine that makes grass sparkle like diamonds after the rain.'

5. "Although things in my house have not been perfect, God made a covenant to establish the royal house of David forever. All I desired is my sal-

vation, but He will bring His covenant to pass.

6-7. "When He comes, evil people will be thrown away like thorns. Right now no one can touch them without getting hurt. The only way to control them is with iron spears. But when the Lord comes, He will destroy them by fire, and they will be gone forever."

David's Great Warriors

8. David had great warriors, such as The Famous Three. Their leader was fearless. He killed 300 men in one battle and 800 altogether.

9-10. The second of The Famous Three once stood alone with David against a horde of Philistines after the other men backed away. The Lord gave them the victory, and the men came back.

11-12. The third of The Famous Three once stood alone against the Philistines when the other men had fled. When he was attacked, he fought the Philistines, and God gave him a great victory.

13-15. David had another group called The Mighty Thirty. Three of these were once with David in a cave when he was hiding from Saul. The Philistines were everywhere. One day David said, "How I wish I had a drink of water from the well of Bethlehem, my hometown!"

16. Then these three broke through the lines of the Philistines and got him some water from the well of Bethlehem. But David refused to drink it. He poured it out on the ground as an offering to the Lord.

17. He said to the three of them, "You could have been killed! How could I have enjoyed this water knowing that you risked your lives for it?" These were the kinds of things The Mighty Thirty did.

18-19. Now Abishai, the brother of Joab, was the leader of The Mighty Thirty. During one long battle he killed 300 men. This kind of bravery made him equal to The Famous Three and highly respected by them and by his men.

20-21. Benaiah was also one of The Mighty Thirty. He killed two giant Moabite fighters who had attacked him at the same time. He also went down in a pit to kill a trapped lion. And when a seven-and-a-half-foot-tall Egyptian came at him with a spear, he took his spear away from him and killed him.

22-23. Benaiah was highly respected even though he didn't equal The Famous Three. He was in charge of David's bodyguards.

24-39. There were others who at one time or another were part of The Mighty Thirty. One was Asahel, the younger brother of Joab, and Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba.

David's Pride

24 Near the end of David's life, Israel had become proud and wanted to be like other nations. David decided to count all the men of military age to show off how big an army he had.

2. So he called for Joab and said, "Send your men throughout Israel to see how large an army we would have if we decided to go to war."

3. Joab answered, "If the Lord decides to enlarge Israel by war, He'll give us the army we need. What you're asking sounds more like pride. This count is not a good thing to do."

4-8. But the king insisted, and ordered Joab to do it. So Joab and his men began at the southern border and worked back and forth across the country to the northern border. It took almost ten months to complete

the job. Then Joab and his men came back and gave the king a report.

9. This was the final count: There were 800,000 men of military age in Israel and almost 500,000 such men in Judah. This did not include the nearly 300,000 men in the country's standing army.

David's Conscience

10. Then David's conscience really started to bother him, and he realized that he had given in to pride. He prayed, "O Lord, I have sinned. I never should have done that! How foolish of me! Please forgive me and take away my sin and guilt."

11-12. Early the next morning the Lord said to the prophet Gad, "Go and tell David, 'I have heard your prayers and forgiven you. But the people too have become proud, so I must discipline the whole country. Since you're the king, I will give you three choices. You choose which discipline for the country you think best.'"

13-14. So the prophet went to see David and gave him the three choices: "Should there be three years of drought, three months of war, or three days of sickness on the country?" David said, "This is awful! How can I decide such a thing? But this I know, it's better to let the Lord discipline us than to go to war, because He is merciful."

15. So the Lord decided to send sickness on the country for three days. Thousands of fighting men who were filled with pride died.

16-17. Then David saw an angel standing on Mount Moriah with a sword in his hand ready to strike more such men in Jerusalem. But the Lord said, "Stop! That's enough." When David saw this, he said, "O Lord, I'm the one who sinned. The people are my sheep. Don't punish them; punish me!"

18-19. Then the prophet came to see David and said, "Go up to Mount Moriah where you saw the angel standing and build an altar to the Lord." So David and his officials made their way up the hill.

20-21. When the man who owned the hill saw them, he bowed and said, "Why are you coming to see me?" David said, "I have come to buy your property to build an altar for the Lord and to stop this sickness from spreading."

22-23. The man said, "The king may have anything he wishes. You may use

my oxen for sacrifice and the boards of my threshing floor for wood. May the God of Israel answer your prayers."

24. David said, "No, I will not give the Lord an offering that doesn't cost me anything." So David bought the threshing floor and oxen for fifty pieces of silver and the whole hill for 600 gold coins. From then on the place was seen as holy.

25. So David built the altar, and the priests sacrificed the oxen as peace offerings. The Lord answered David's prayer, and the sickness stopped.

1 Kings

INTRODUCTION: *The history in this book was most likely put together by the prophet Jeremiah. We learn that after David died, his son Solomon became king. He ruled for forty years, from about 970 to 930 B.C. During his early reign he was good, but later he began to worship idols. But before he died, he turned back to God. His son Rehoboam became the next king. It was under his reign that the country split into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom, called Israel; and the southern kingdom, called Judah. God sent prophets such as Elijah and Elisha to help the people turn back to Him.*

Rebellion

1 When David was very old he had so little energy that he couldn't keep warm, no matter how many blankets were given him. His servants said to him, "You need a nurse. Let us find a young woman to take care of you." So David agreed.

3-4. They found a beautiful young woman living near Mount Tabor who agreed to come to Jerusalem to look after the king.

5-6. After Absalom's death, Adonijah, another son of David's, wanted to be king. He rode his chariots through the city and had fifty men run ahead of him announcing his coming, just as his brother Absalom had done. Adonijah was born after Absalom, and was also very handsome.

7-8. He talked to Commander Joab and Abiathar, the high priest in Jerusalem, about taking his father's place as king. They decided to support him, even though David had already appointed Solomon to be the next king. But Zadok, the other high priest; Benaliah, the head of the king's bodyguards; and Nathan the prophet did not support Adonijah.

9-10. One day Adonijah went to Snake Rock just south of Jerusalem to offer various sacrifices to the Lord. He also

decided to hold a huge thanksgiving feast and invite his brothers, the leaders of Judah, and other important people from the palace. But he did not invite Solomon, Benaiah, or Nathan the prophet.

11-12. Nathan went to Solomon's mother and asked, "Have you heard that Adonijah is planning to be the next king? If he becomes king, he'll execute both you and Solomon. He knows that David wants Solomon to take his place.

13-14. "You need to go and tell David what's happening and remind him that God said that Solomon should be the next king. Adonijah is really rebelling against God. After you talk to David, I'll talk to him and confirm what the Lord said."

15-17. So Bathsheba went to see David, sat by his bed, and said, "Didn't you tell me that God wanted Solomon to take your place?"

18-21. "Adonijah is telling everyone that he's going to be the next king. He has offered sacrifices and is holding a thanksgiving feast. He's invited Joab, Abiathar, and all his brothers. Now everyone is looking to you for an answer. If you don't do anything, as soon as you die Adonijah will be king, and Solomon will be executed."

22-24. Bathsheba had barely finished when Nathan the prophet asked to see the king. David agreed to see him. So Bathsheba excused herself, and Nathan came in, sat by David's bed, and said, "Did you say that Adonijah is to take your place?"

25. "He's telling everyone that he'll be the next king. He's already holding a feast in anticipation of the occasion. He's offered sacrifices and has invited all his brothers, your officers, and Abiathar the high priest. They're all there, and the people are shouting, 'Long live King Adonijah!'"

26-27. "But he didn't invite Solomon; Zadok, the other high priest; Benaiah; or me because he knows that we don't support him. If you want him to be the next king, why didn't you tell us?"

David Makes Solomon King

28. Even though David was very weak, his mind was clear, and he showed his same old courage. He said to Nathan, "Go and ask Bathsheba to come back." Nathan left and sent Bathsheba back in.

29-31. David made this oath: "As surely as the Lord who delivered me many times lives, Solomon will be king. I will obey the Lord, and this very day Solomon will sit on my throne." Bathsheba, who was kneeling by David's bed, bowed and responded, "May my lord, the king, live forever."

32-33. David said, "Go and call Zadok, the high priest; Nathan the prophet; and Benaiah, the head of my bodyguard, to come and see me at once!" When they came, he said, "Get my personal servants, and my royal mule for Solomon to sit on. Then go through the city out to the Gihon Spring near where Adonijah is holding his feast."

34-35. "When you get there, I want

you, Zadok, and Nathan to anoint Solomon as king. Then blow the ram's horn and shout, 'Long live King Solomon!' After that, come back to the palace and have Solomon sit on my throne. I have chosen him to be king in harmony with the Lord's will."

36-40. Benaiah said, "Let the will of the king be done! As the Lord was with the king, may He be with Solomon!" Then they did what David had said. When they got to the Gihon Spring, they anointed Solomon and blew the ram's horn, and the people shouted, "Long live King Solomon!" As they returned, they sang and shouted for joy.

41-42. Adonijah and his guests were finishing eating when they heard the shouting. Joab said, "I wonder what that's all about." Just then Jonathan, the son of Abiathar the high priest, came running. Adonijah said to him, "You're a courageous young man; what's the good news?"

43-45. Jonathan answered, "I don't have good news. David just made Solomon king. He rode on the king's mule, they anointed him at the Gihon Spring, and he's already back in Jerusalem. The people are shouting, 'Long live King Solomon!' That's the noise you hear."

46-48. "He's sitting on David's throne; the officials have accepted him and thanked David for choosing him. They're saying, 'May the Lord make Solomon's kingdom even bigger than David's.' The king has accepted their thanks. From his bed he has said, 'Praise be to the God of Israel, who let me live to see my son on the throne.'"

49-52. When Adonijah and his guests heard that, they got scared and left. Adonijah headed for the sanctuary to confess his sin of going against the will of the Lord. Someone told

Solomon where he was and that he was asking for forgiveness. Solomon replied, "If he's loyal to me, nothing will happen to him. If not, he'll have to be executed."

53. Then Solomon sent some men to tell Adonijah that it was safe for him to come to the palace. When he arrived, he bowed, and Solomon said, "I have forgiven you. Remain loyal and go in peace."

David Dies

2 As David grew weaker, he called for Solomon and said to him, "I could die any day now. I want you to be a courageous king for the Lord. Do what God says. Keep His commandments, and He will bless and prosper you. He gave us His laws for our good. The Lord promised that if we obey Him, our royal house will never fail."

5-6. "You remember how your cousin Joab shamed my name and dishonored the throne by killing two great generals in cold blood. He never gave them a chance to defend themselves. I couldn't do anything about it because I had killed Uriah when he was innocent. At the right time, have Joab pay for what he did and do it publicly."

7. "Be kind to the sons of the old man who brought us blankets and food when I had to flee from Absalom. Make sure that that family always has enough to eat."

8-9. "Then there is Shimei, the man who cursed me. After your brother Absalom was killed, Shimei switched sides and welcomed me back. He met me at the Jordan River and asked me to forgive him, which I did. But you can't trust him. So keep an eye on him. You know what to do if you have to."

10-12. David talked to Solomon for a long time. Later he died and was

buried in Jerusalem near the palace. He had been king for more than forty years, first in Hebron and then in Jerusalem. Solomon now ruled in his father's place, and the kingdom was firmly in his hands.

Solomon and Adonijah

13-14. Not long afterward, Solomon's older brother, Adonijah, went to see Bathsheba. She asked, "Is this a friendly visit?" He replied, "It is." So she agreed to listen to him. He said, "I have something important to ask you." She asked, "Well, what is it?"

15-18. He said, "As you know, the people wanted me to be king, but my father chose Solomon because that was the Lord's choice. So I have only one request. Ask Solomon to let me marry David's nurse, the one who took care of him before he died." Bathsheba said, "That's reasonable. I'll ask Solomon and let you know."

19-21. So Bathsheba went to see Solomon. When he saw her coming, he had a royal chair brought for her so that she could sit next to him. He asked why she had come, and she said, "I have a small favor to ask." He said, "What is it?" She answered, "Adonijah would like the nurse who took care of your father to be one of his wives."

22. Solomon responded, "Do you realize what he means by this? The people consider her to be one of my father's wives. If I let Adonijah marry her, it would be like giving him the right to David's house and to his throne. I'm king only because of God's will. Adonijah is older and thinks he should be the king. That's what one of the high priests and Joab would like."

23-25. Then Solomon took an oath saying, "As surely as the Lord lives, Adonijah will pay for this scheming to

get the throne. The Lord wants me to look after His kingdom and the royal house of David, and I will." So he ordered Benaiah, the head of the king's bodyguards, to arrest Adonijah and execute him, which he did.

Solomon and Joab

26-27. The king also sent this message to the high priest who had supported Adonijah: "I want you to retire and move back to your hometown. You deserve to die. However, because you shared the hardships of my father when he had to flee from Saul, and you helped him bring the ark to Jerusalem, I will let you live. But your priesthood will end."

28. When Joab heard what had happened to the high priest, he knew he was next. So he went to the sanctuary as soon as he could.

29. When Solomon heard that, he sent Benaiah to arrest Joab and execute him. But Joab refused to leave the sanctuary.

30-31. Benaiah sent word back asking the king what to do. Solomon said, "If he won't let you arrest him and take him out of the sanctuary, then execute him right there. That's his choice. He deserves to die, because he supported Adonijah.

32-33. "He also deserves to die because he greeted the two generals, Abner and Amasa, as friends and then killed them. They never had a chance to defend themselves. So go back and see that justice is done, and peace will return to the country."

34-35. So Benaiah went back and executed Joab right there in the sanctuary. Then he took his body and buried it near his house in the open country. After that Solomon asked Benaiah to take Joab's place as head of the armies of Israel. And he asked

Zadok, the other high priest, to take charge of the ark in Jerusalem as well as the sanctuary.

Solomon and Shimei

36. Next the king sent for Shimei and said to him, "Because you publicly cursed David for taking the throne away from Saul, I could have you executed. But when my father came back, you welcomed him and asked him to forgive you, which he did. So I'll let you live. But I want you to move here to Jerusalem so I can keep an eye on you.

37. "The day you leave the city, I'll have you arrested and executed, because you might have switched sides again."

38-40. Shimei answered, "Your Majesty, you are kind. I will do as you say." So he moved to Jerusalem. But three years later two of his servants ran away. So he got on his donkey and went after them. He found them in another city and brought them back.

41-43. When Solomon heard that Shimei had left Jerusalem, he called him in and said, "Didn't you take an oath not to leave Jerusalem? Why did you do it? Why didn't you send someone else to find your servants and bring them back? I can't trust what you say.

44-45. "You know all the wrong you did to my father, but he forgave you. You have brought judgment on yourself. You must pay for what you have done, not only for leaving Jerusalem, but for supporting Absalom in his rebellion against David. For the sake of peace in Israel, justice needs to be done."

46. Then the king ordered Benaiah to take Shimei away and execute him. So the kingdom of David was now firmly in the hands of Solomon.

Solomon Prays for Wisdom

3 After that, Solomon began making friends with other nations. In those days this meant that the king would marry someone from that country. So Solomon married the king of Egypt's daughter and brought her to Jerusalem. He also began to build a palace for himself, as well as the temple his father had planned, and a city wall.

3-4. Solomon loved the Lord and did what his father told him to do. He offered sacrifices to the Lord in various places throughout the country, which was not what God allowed. But he also offered sacrifices in Gibeon, where the sanctuary tent was.

5-6. One night God spoke to Solomon at Gibeon, saying, "Is there something special you would like Me to do for you?" Solomon answered, "Lord, You were very kind to my father, who loved You and served You. He accepted Your discipline without complaining.

7-9. "Now You have chosen me to take his place. But I feel like a little child when it comes to ruling this country. What I would like is wisdom to know the difference between right and wrong so that I can help Your people. Who can govern so many people and do everything right?"

10-14. The Lord was happy with Solomon's request. So He replied, "Since you asked for wisdom instead of wealth, or a long life, or the death of your enemies, I will give you the wisdom you have asked for. Besides that, I will give you wealth and honor as long as you keep My commandments. I will also give you a long and healthy life."

15. Then Solomon woke up from his dream and knew that the Lord had spoken to him. So he returned to Jerusalem, where the ark was, and offered sacrifices to the Lord there. He

also held a feast of thanksgiving for everyone in the palace.

Two Mothers and One Baby

16-18. One of the first cases that Solomon had to judge was between two single mothers. As they stood before the king, one of them said, "Your Majesty, this other woman and I live in the same house. I had a baby boy, and three days later she too had a baby boy.

19-21. During the night she accidentally rolled over on her baby and smothered it. When she woke up and saw that it was dead, she took my baby while I was sleeping and put her baby next to me. When I woke up and looked at the baby, I knew it wasn't mine!"

22-23. Then the other woman objected, "That's not true! The dead baby is yours!" So they stood in front of the king arguing. Solomon quieted them down, saying, "One of you says one thing, and the other says something else. How am I supposed to know who's telling the truth?"

24-26. He turned to one of his servants and said, "Take a sword, cut the baby in two, and give each woman one half." The first woman said, "No! Don't hurt the baby! Give it to her." But the woman holding the infant said, "The king is right. That will solve the problem."

27-28. The king said, "Stop! Don't kill the baby. Give it to the first woman. She's the real mother, because she wants it to live." When the people heard what had happened, they greatly respected the king and knew that the Lord had filled him with wisdom.

Solomon's Government

4 As king over all Israel, Solomon had two royal secretaries, a man in charge of government records, a commander-in-chief, an active and a

retired high priest, a supervisor over the local governors, a personal adviser, someone to supervise things at the palace, and someone in charge of the labor force.

7-19. The king divided the country into twelve districts and appointed a tax officer over each one. These men made sure that each district provided food for the king and all those in the palace for one month. And the tax officer over Judah was in charge of all the others.

Solomon's Kingdom

20. By now Israel had a big population. You could hardly count them all. They were well taken care of and very happy.

21. Solomon's kingdom extended from the Arabian wilderness in the east to the Mediterranean in the west, and from the river Euphrates in the north to the border of Egypt in the south. Everyone paid their taxes, even those Canaanites still living in the land.

22-25. Solomon had a huge palace and thousands of people working for him. It took a lot of food just to feed them. He was respected by all the countries around him, and they all were at peace with him. Each family in Israel had its own property and didn't have to worry about it being taken away.

26-28. Solomon also had lots of chariots and thousands of horses and riders. They were stationed at various military bases around the country. Each month one of the twelve tax officers made sure that his district provided enough food for the king, his workers, and the military. The men and their horses never lacked for anything.

29-31. In addition to all this, the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, good judg-

ment, and understanding. He was wiser than anyone in that part of the world, including Egypt. He had more understanding than anyone in the surrounding countries.

32-34. He wrote more than 3,000 proverbs and 1,000 songs. He talked about all kinds of things, from plants to trees and from land animals to birds and fish. People came from everywhere to listen to him. And countries sent their scholars to learn about his wisdom.

Solomon Prepares to Build

5 King Hiram of the city of Tyre had always been a friend of David's. When he heard that David's son Solomon was now king, he sent ambassadors to congratulate him and to offer his friendship. Solomon welcomed them and sent this letter back:

34. "Thank you for your friendship. You know that my father had to fight our enemies most of his life. Because he was known as a fighter, he was not allowed to build a temple to the God of heaven. God wants His Temple to be known as a temple of peace, not a temple of war. Now that there's peace, we can go ahead and build.

5-6. "The Lord said to my father, 'Your son will be the next king, and he will build the Temple for Me.' I need your help. Would you ask your men to cut down some of the big cedar trees in the forest of Lebanon? I'll send my men to help. I'll also pay your workers whatever you say. No men are as skillful in cutting down trees as they are."

7. When they gave Hiram the letter, he said, "Praise to Israel's God, who has given David such a wise and peace-loving son."

8-9. Then Hiram sent this message back: "I received your letter and will

be happy to help you. I'll have my men cut down the big cedars that you need and then float them along the coast to Israel. Your men can take them inland to Jerusalem. All you need to do is provide food for my men. I'll pay their wages." And Solomon agreed.

10-12. So he sent Hiram thousands of bushels of wheat and gallons of olive oil, as well as tons of other food. He did this every year as long as Hiram's men were cutting trees for him. The Lord blessed Solomon with wisdom in all that he did. So he and Hiram became friends and made a peace treaty between them.

13-14. Then Solomon drafted thousands of men from all over the country to work for him. They would work one month at a time to haul the big logs from the coast to Jerusalem. Then they would go home for two months before coming back.

15-17. Solomon also had thousands of stonecutters working in the hills. And he had hundreds of supervisors over the different projects to make sure that everything was done on time. The stones they cut and shaped for the Temple were huge and very heavy.

18. The men from Israel and Tyre, as well as craftsmen from other countries, all worked together to prepare the wood and stones needed to build the Temple.

Solomon Builds the Temple

6In the fourth year of Solomon's reign he began building the Temple. The sanctuary part of it was more than 100 feet long, thirty-six feet wide, and fifty-five feet high. This did not include the front entrance. On three sides of the Temple, Solomon built a three-story building with rooms for workers and priests.

7. The massive blocks of stones were

measured and cut at the quarry. They were brought to the building site and put together without the noise of hammers or other tools.

8-10. The three-story building had outside stairs and a roof of cedar-wood, and was built against the outside wall of the Temple.

11-13. Then the Lord spoke to Solomon and said, "Don't think that this Temple is big enough to hold Me. My throne is in heaven, and the world is like a footstool for Me. But if you keep My commandments, I will keep the promise I made to your father David. I told him I would come and live in this Temple and would not forsake My people."

14-18. So Solomon continued building the Temple until it was finished. The inside walls of the sanctuary were covered with cedar. The Most Holy Place was thirty-six feet square, and the Holy Place was thirty-six feet wide and seventy-two feet long. The cedar walls of both rooms had beautiful carvings of flowers on them.

19-22. The ark was put in the Most Holy Place, where the walls were totally covered with gold. Even the little altar of incense was covered with gold. A curtain was hung from chains of gold across the entrance. Solomon also covered the walls of the Holy Place with gold so that the walls of the whole sanctuary were the same.

23-28. Solomon had two huge angels made of olive wood for the Most Holy Place. Each angel was eighteen feet tall, and their wings stretched across the whole room. Both angels were covered with gold.

29-30. Solomon had palm trees and flowers carved into the walls. These carvings, as well as the wooden floors, were then overlaid with gold.

31-35. Then he made a huge double

door frame of olive wood for the entrance to the Holy Place. Each door was made of cypress, about nine feet tall and three and a half feet wide, overlaid with gold.

36. There were two courtyards inside the Temple, one for the priests and one for the people. Each was enclosed with walls of carefully cut stones and cedar beams.

37-38. Work on the Temple began in the fourth year of Solomon's reign and was finished in the eleventh year. It took seven years. And Solomon built it just as his father, David, had planned.

Solomon's Other Projects

7 Solomon also built a palace complex that took thirteen years to complete. Inside was the Great Hall of Lebanon, which was 150 feet long, seventy-five feet wide, and forty-five feet high. Its walls were paneled with cedar, and the ceiling beams rested on four rows of pillars. The windows were up high to let light in, and doorways were on both sides of the hall.

6-7. The porch was as wide as the entrance and had an overhanging roof resting on pillars. The whole porch was made of cedarwood. The Hall of Justice, where Solomon held court, was also covered with cedar.

8-12. Solomon lived in the palace, and his wife, the daughter of the king of Egypt, had a palace of her own. The whole structure of the palace complex was made of cut stones like those used to build the Temple.

Temple Pillars and Furniture

13-22. The king of Tyre also sent Solomon a craftsman whose ancestor had helped Moses build the sanctuary. Hiram made two pillars for the entrance to the sanctuary. Each one was more than thirty-six feet tall, with

a crown shaped like a lily. One pillar was named Jachin, meaning God Builds, and the other was named Boaz, meaning God Strengthens.

23-26. Solomon had a huge bronze basin made for the courtyard of the sanctuary. It was eighteen feet across and held thousands of gallons of water for the priests to use for themselves and their sacrifices. The basin had carvings all around it and rested on the backs of twelve bronze bulls. It was shaped like a lily.

27-39. He also had ten big carts made, each with a small basin. The wooden panels had carvings of lions, bulls, and angels on them. The wheels looked like those on chariots. All ten carts were alike, and each basin could hold nearly 200 gallons of water. Five carts were placed on the south side and five on the north side of the huge basin.

40-47. Hiram also made special pots, bowls, and other items needed for the sanctuary. Altogether he made the two huge pillars, the huge basin on twelve bronze oxen, the ten carts, and the special bowls, pots, and other needed items. They were all made in the Jordan Valley before being brought to the Temple.

48-50. Solomon had the altar of incense covered with gold. He had lampstands and bread tables made, five for the north side of the Holy Place and five for the south. The dishes, pots, and pans for the Holy Place were all made of gold.

51. When the Temple was finished, Solomon brought in all the silver and gold his father had given to the Lord and put it in the Temple treasury.

The Ark Brought to the Temple

8 Then Solomon invited all the tribal leaders to come to Jerusalem to witness the moving of

the ark to the Temple on Mount Moriah. All this took place on the first day of the seventh month. Ten days later the Day of Atonement was to be held, followed by the Festival of Tabernacles, or Shelters.

3-4. When the leaders were all present, the priests supervised the Levites as they carried the ark all the way to the Temple. Then they moved all the other items from the sanctuary tent to the Temple.

5-8. Solomon and all the leaders and officials gathered in front of the sanctuary tent where the ark was and offered many sacrifices. Then the Levites picked up the ark and carried it to the Temple. They put it in the Most Holy Place and set it between the two huge angels that Solomon had made. They left the carrying poles there too.

9. Inside the ark were two stone tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments and given to Moses at Mount Sinai.

10-11. Then the priests directed the Levites where to place the furniture for the Holy Place. When they finished and came out, the presence of the Lord filled the Temple. It was so bright that the priests had to leave until the brightness faded and they could come back without being blinded.

12-13. Then Solomon prayed and said, "O Lord, You are the one who created light and separated it from the darkness. You have been with our people in a cloud since they left Egypt. We have built this Temple for You. It is Yours forever."

14-16. When he finished, he turned and said to the leaders and the people, "Blessed be the Lord who kept His promise to my father. God assured him, 'From the time that I brought My people out of Egypt until

now, I have not asked for a temple or a city in which to live. But I have chosen you and your descendants to live in Jerusalem and to rule My people.'

17-19. "My father really wanted to build this Temple. His whole heart was set on doing it. He wanted to honor the Lord and exalt the God of Israel. The Lord said to my father, 'I know that you want to build a temple for Me. But you are not the one to do it. Your son will build it for Me.'

20-21. "The Lord kept His promise and chose me to succeed my father. I have built this to honor and exalt the God of Israel above all other gods. The ark is now here, and inside are the same two tablets of stone on which God wrote the Ten Commandments. This is the law around which God made His covenant with our people when they first came out of Egypt."

Solomon's Prayer

22-23. Then Solomon knelt on the platform in the Temple courtyard, raised his hands in prayer, and said, "O Lord, there is no other God like You anywhere in heaven and earth. You keep Your promises. You shower Your people with love and bless those who keep Your law.

24-26. "You kept Your promise to my father, who loved You with all his heart. You told him that his son would build a temple for You. So now here it is. Lord, keep Your other promise that someone from David's family would always rule Israel as long as they obey You. We believe that.

27-30. "But how can Your glory be confined to this Temple? The sky and the earth can't hold it all. Please listen to my prayer. I am Your servant, and I plead for Your mercy. Watch over this Temple. May it always be a place of prayer. When Your people come here

to pray, or face this way and pray, hear their prayers and forgive their sins.

31-32. "When someone is accused of hurting his neighbor, and he comes here and says that he's innocent, please be the judge. If he's guilty and has lied about it, have him face the consequences. But if he is telling the truth and is innocent, clear his name.

33-34. "If the people sin against You, Lord, and are defeated by their enemies and taken captive, please don't forget them. If they look this way and confess their sins, forgive them and bring them back home.

35-38. "If there's a severe drought in the land, and they look this way and confess their sins, please forgive them and send the rain they need. When grasshoppers destroy their crops or sickness hits the land and they ask for forgiveness, please listen to them.

39-40. "Lord, You are the only one who knows what is in the hearts of Your people. So forgive them and answer their prayers. May Your presence keep them from breaking Your commandments, so that they can live safely in the land You gave them.

41-43. "When foreigners join Your people in worship, or people from other countries come here to pray, please listen to them. Answer their prayers in such a way that people everywhere will know that this Temple is Yours and that You are their God too. Then they will love You as we do.

44-45. "When You tell Your people to defend themselves against their attacking enemies, and they look this way asking for help, help them to win.

46-51. "We know that no one is sinless. So if You let the people be taken captive because of what they've

done, please don't abandon them. If they confess their sins and long to go home, please forgive them. Give them the help they need. May their captors be merciful and set them free. They are still Your people, the ones You brought out of Egypt.

52-53. "O Lord, do hear my prayer and the prayers of Your people. You chose us out of all the people in the world to be Your special possession. This is what You told Moses to tell our ancestors before You even brought them out of Egypt."

Solomon Blesses the People

54-55. When Solomon finished praying, he stood up and said to the people, "Let's praise the Lord! Not one of His promises has failed. May the Lord ever be with you as He has been with our ancestors. May He never leave you or forsake you. May He help you to walk in His ways and keep His commandments.

59-61. "May the Lord never forget the prayer that I just prayed. May He always give us the help we need, so that people everywhere will know that He is God. "May your hearts always be in tune with His. May you love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind. May you always obey Him and keep His commandments."

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

62-64. Then Solomon and the people offered thousands of sacrifices to the Lord as part of the dedication services of the Temple. The altar in the sanctuary courtyard was too small to hold them all.

65-66. After the dedication of the Temple, the people celebrated the Festival of Shelters for two whole weeks, twice as long as usual. Then the people blessed the king and, with

hearts overflowing in love for God, praised Him all the way home for what He had done for Israel.

God Talks to Solomon

9 After the Temple was dedicated, God said to Solomon, "I heard the prayer that you prayed. I have accepted this Temple as My own, and with My presence I will make it holy. If My people obey Me, I will watch over it with all My heart.

4-5. "And if you love Me with all your heart as your father did, I will keep the promise that I made to him. Someone from his family will always sit on the throne and rule Israel.

6-7. "But if you or those after you turn away from Me and don't keep My commandments, then I will have no choice but to turn away from this Temple. I will have to withhold My blessings and stop My protection. Israel will be invaded, and people will be taken captive. They will be laughed at wherever they are.

8. "My plan is for this Temple to stand forever as a place of worship and a reminder of what I have done for Israel. But if I ever turn away from it, it will be destroyed. Then people who come this way will see the ruins and say, 'Why did God let this happen?'

9. "Others will say, 'Because the people turned away from Him. They did this after He brought them out of Egypt and blessed them. They turned away from Him and worshiped other gods. That's why this happened.'"

Solomon and King Hiram

10-12. It took Solomon twenty years to build both the Temple and the palace. Hiram, king of Tyre, gave him all the cedarwood and gold he needed. As payment Solomon gave him twenty cities to enlarge His king-

dom. When Hiram visited them, he was disappointed.

13-14. He sent this message to Solomon: "Friend, are these the cities you're giving to me? They're good for nothing." So that's what their territory was called: Good for Nothing. Hiram felt that the cities he got in exchange for the cedarwood and gold were worthless to him.

Solomon's Achievements

15-19. Solomon built not only the Temple and the palace, but also many beautiful gardens and a wall around the city. He also rebuilt other cities, including the city that the king of Egypt gave him when he married his daughter. Some of these cities were used for storing surplus grain and others for military outposts.

20-23. He used the descendants of the Canaanites and others who still lived in the country as laborers. They did the heavy work. The Israelites served as supervisors, soldiers, chariot drivers, captains, and other government officials.

24. Solomon also built a palace for his Egyptian wife. It was west of the Temple and surrounded by hillside gardens to make her feel at home.

25. During all this time he never failed to fulfill his responsibilities to the Lord. Three times a year he brought many sacrifices to the Temple as a sign of renewed dedication to the God of Israel.

26-28. Solomon also built a fleet of ships to sail to other countries to exchange goods. Hiram, king of Tyre, sent experienced sailors to train Solomon's men and to help them sail their ships. They would sail along the coasts of Africa and bring back tons of gold and other precious things.

The Queen of Sheba

10 When the queen of Sheba heard how God had blessed Solomon and had given him such wisdom, she decided to go and see for herself. She came to Jerusalem with many servants and lots of camels carrying gold, spices, and precious stones. She asked Solomon every question she could think of, and he answered them all.

4-5. She was impressed not only with Solomon's wisdom, but also with the beautiful palace and everything else that he had built. She noticed the many officials he had, the food they ate, and how well dressed his servants and waiters were. She also took note of the special entryway going into the Temple and the many sacrifices that Solomon offered. She was totally overwhelmed.

6-8. She said to Solomon, "When I heard about your accomplishments, I didn't believe it until I came and saw everything myself. They didn't tell me half of what I've seen. How fortunate your people are to have a king like you! And how privileged your officials and servants are to serve you!"

9. "Praise to the Lord your God, who must have been pleased with you. He put you on the throne. He must really love Israel to give you such wisdom and help you rule this country so well. It's so peaceful here."

10. Then she gave him tons of gold and many spices and precious stones. Never again was so much gold, and so many spices and precious stones, brought into the country at one time.

11-12. Before this, Solomon and Hiram's sailors had sailed to southwestern Arabia and brought back gold, spices, precious stones and sandalwood. That's how the queen of Sheba first heard about Solomon.

Sandalwood was used in the Temple, the palace, and for making harps. Never again was so much of it brought into the country.

13. When the queen of Sheba was ready to leave, Solomon gave her whatever she asked for. Then she left with her servants and went back to her own country amazed at what she had seen and heard about Solomon and the greatness of his God.

Solomon's Wealth

14-15. The taxes that Solomon took in every year were equal to twenty-five tons of gold. This did not include what came in from international trade and from other kings and governors.

16-17. Solomon had 200 large gold shields made for his bodyguards and 300 smaller gold shields for the palace guards. These shields hung in the Hall of Lebanon and were used only on special occasions.

18-20. Solomon's throne was very big. It was made of ivory and gold and had a high back and two armrests. Beside each armrest stood a statue of a lion. Six wide steps led up to the throne, with a statue of a smaller lion on each end. There was nothing like it in any other kingdom.

21. All of Solomon's dinnerware was made of gold. Nothing was made of silver, because there was so much of it in the country it had little value.

22-23. Solomon also had a large fleet of ships. Every three years his men would sail to different places and bring home gold, silver, and ivory, and also peacocks, monkeys, and apes. He was the richest king among all nations of his day.

24-25. Kings came from everywhere to hear his wisdom and learn about his God. Each time they would bring gifts of gold, spices, beautiful robes, chariots,

horses, or weapons of war with them.

26-27. Solomon had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses. They were stationed at military posts all over the country, as well as in Jerusalem. And silver was everywhere, as common as stones.

28-29. In addition to the horses and chariots the kings gave Solomon, he bought other horses and chariots from Egypt and Turkey and sold them at a profit to other countries.

Solomon and Idols

11 Solomon had many wives, because each time he made a peace treaty with a country he had to marry one of their important women. God had told His people not to marry those who worshiped other gods. But Solomon thought he was strong enough to resist their influence. Hundreds of these women were living in the palace, and soon they turned his heart away from God. **4-8.** Solomon began worshiping other gods in addition to the God of Israel. He no longer followed the Lord, as his father David had done. To please his wives, he built places of worship for their gods on the Mount of Olives.

9-13. The Lord was very displeased with Solomon, especially since the times He had talked to him before. Now He spoke to him again and said, "Because you have not kept the law, I will take the kingdom away from you. But for the sake of your father I won't do it until you die. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin will stay with your son."

Solomon's Enemies

14-22. Then the Lord let Solomon's enemies rise up against him. One such nation was Edom. David thought he had destroyed their royal house, but one young prince had es-

caped and gone to Egypt. The Egyptian king welcomed him, and the young man even married an Egyptian princess. But later he returned and became one of Solomon's bitterest enemies.

23-25. The Lord also permitted people in the north to revolt against Solomon. David had defeated these people and their Syrian friends. But one of their captains went to Syria and became king. He too became a bitter enemy.

Jeroboam's Rebellion

26-28. Jeroboam, one of Solomon's officials, rebelled against him, and the Lord didn't interfere. It started when Solomon put him in charge of the laborers doing the building in Jerusalem. Jeroboam didn't like some of the things that Solomon was doing. So he left Jerusalem and went to Egypt.

29-32. On the way, he met Ahijah the prophet. As they talked together the prophet took his new robe, tore it into twelve pieces, and gave him ten pieces. He said, "Here, take these. They're for you. The Lord says, 'I will take ten tribes from Solomon and give them to you. But for the sake of David, I will leave two of them for Solomon's son.'

33-37. " 'Solomon has disobeyed Me. He is worshiping other gods and is not keeping My commandments. For the sake of his father, I will let him stay on as king as long as he lives. When he dies and his son becomes king, I will give ten tribes to you. Judah and Benjamin will stay with him. You will be king over the rest of Israel.

38-39. " 'If you keep My commandments and love Me, as David did, I will bless you as I blessed him. Your descendants will be the future kings

of Israel. Because of Solomon's wickedness I will humble his descendants, but not forever.'"

Solomon Dies

40. Because Jeroboam disapproved of some things Solomon was doing, the king tried to have him killed. That's why he fled to Egypt and stayed there until Solomon died.

41-43. Everything that Solomon did, and the wisdom he had, is written in the books of the prophets Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo. Solomon was king for forty years. When he died, he was buried in Jerusalem, as his father was, and his son Rehoboam became king.

Ten Tribes Rebel

12 The leaders of Israel wanted to crown Rehoboam king in the city of Shechem, and he agreed. Now when Jeroboam in Egypt heard that Solomon had died, he came back home and was invited to attend the ceremony. Then the leaders went with him to ask Rehoboam about the heavy taxes the people were paying.

4-5. He spoke up and said to Rehoboam, "Your father made us pay a lot of taxes. Why don't you lower our taxes, and we'll be happy to have you as our king." Rehoboam answered, "Let me think about it. Come back the day after tomorrow, and I'll have an answer for you."

6-7. Rehoboam called for the older counselors who had worked for his father and asked them what to do. They said, "If you want to help the people, be kind to them. Reduce their taxes, and they'll be happy to serve you."

8-9. Rehoboam didn't like their answer. So he called for the young counselors—the ones he had grown

up with—and asked them what to do. **10-11.** They said, "Tell the people that your little finger will be heavier on them than your father's whole body. Tell them that you will increase their taxes. If the taxes they now pay hurt like a whip, the increased taxes will sting like scorpions. This will teach them to respect you."

12-13. On the third day Jeroboam and the leaders came to hear what Rehoboam had to say. He ignored the advice of the older counselors and followed the advice of his young friends.

14-15. So he told the people that he would increase their taxes so high that they would feel as if they had been stung by scorpions. He was determined to show them who was in charge. Then what the prophet had told Jeroboam years before happened.

16-17. When the leaders of Israel saw that Rehoboam would not be reasonable, they said, "Why should we pay taxes to him? Let's leave! Let him rule his own tribe!" So they refused to accept him as king. This split the kingdom and left Rehoboam only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

18-20. Later when Rehoboam sent one of his officials to get workers for his building projects, the people stoned the official, and he died. That's when Rehoboam realized that the people meant what they said. Then the ten tribes formed their own kingdom and made Jeroboam their king.

21-24. Rehoboam was determined to keep the country together. So he called up the troops and headed north to force the ten tribes to come back. But the Lord sent a prophet to him with this message: "I do not want you to attack your brothers. What has happened is from Me." Rehoboam listened and did what the Lord said.

Golden Calves

25-27. Then Jeroboam fortified the city of Shechem and made it his capital. He also built military outposts to guard the borders and to control his people. He said to himself, "If they go to Jerusalem to worship, it won't be long before they'll be loyal to Rehoboam."

28. So he talked the problem over with his advisers, and they decided to make two golden calves, like the one Aaron had made at Sinai. Then he said to the people, "These golden calves represent the Lord and what He has done for us. From now on you don't have to go to Jerusalem to worship."

29. He also built a shrine for each of the calves, one to the north in the city of Dan, and one to the south in the city of Bethel.

30-31. By doing this, Jeroboam led the people away from God and more and more into idol worship. He built shrines for other gods all over the country and appointed all those who volunteered to serve as priests. As a result, the people became more sinful.

32-33. He also instituted a religious festival to be held one month after the Festival of Shelters was held in Judah. He had his priests offer sacrifices at all the shrines throughout the country. During the festival Jeroboam himself went to Bethel to offer sacrifices and to dedicate the new altar.

The Prophet and the King

13 Then the Lord sent a prophet to Bethel to see Jeroboam. He got there just as the king was ready to offer a sacrifice. He looked at the altar and said, "O altar! The Lord says, 'A baby will be born to the family of David named Josiah. He will destroy you and all the priests who serve here.'"

3. Then he turned to the people and

said, "This is a sign to show that what the Lord said will happen. This altar will split open, and the ashes of the sacrifices will spill on the ground."

4-6. When Jeroboam heard that, he pointed at the prophet and shouted, "Grab him!" Instantly his arm became paralyzed, and he couldn't pull it back. The altar split, and its ashes fell on the ground. Then Jeroboam pleaded, "Please pray and ask the Lord to restore my arm." The prophet prayed, and the king's arm was healed.

7-10. Jeroboam invited the prophet to eat with him and promised him a present. But the man of God said, "Even if you gave me half of your kingdom, I wouldn't think of eating in this place. Besides, the Lord told me not to eat here or on the way home." So the man of God left and went back home a different way, as the Lord had told him to.

The Prophet and the Lion

11-13. Now, there was an old man living in Bethel who claimed to be a prophet. That day his sons came running home and told their father everything that had happened. Their father said, "Which way did the prophet go? Quick! Saddle my donkey." Then he got on it and hurried to find him.

14-17. The old man found the prophet resting in the shade of a large oak tree. He asked him, "Are you the prophet from Judah?" The man answered, "Yes, I am." Then the old man invited him home for supper. The prophet said, "The Lord told me not to eat until I got back home. He also told me not to go back the way I came."

18-19. The old man said, "I'm a prophet too. Just a little while ago an angel told me to find you and to bring you home for supper." The old man

was lying, but the prophet believed him. So he went home with him without asking the Lord about it.

20-22. While they were eating, the Lord gave the old man this message, which he gave to the prophet: "Since you stopped and ate in Israel when I told you not to, I will have to punish you. If I don't, Jeroboam will not believe anything you said. Only if you die for what you have done will he take what you said seriously."

23-26. After they finished eating, the prophet got up to leave. The old man saddled a donkey, and gave it to him as a present. The prophet thanked him, got on the donkey, and left. Outside the city a lion attacked and killed him. But it didn't hurt the donkey. Some men came along and saw the lion standing beside the prophet's body. They ran and told everyone they met.

27-29. When the old man heard it, he said to his sons, "Quick! Saddle my donkey!" He went with the men and saw the prophet's body lying in the middle of the road and the lion and donkey just standing there. Then the lion left, and the men put the prophet's body on the donkey and took it back to the city for burial.

30-32. The old man and his sons buried the prophet in the family tomb. The old man cried and said, "My brother, my brother! What have I done to you?" Then he said to his sons, "When I die, put my body next to his. Now we know that what he said against the king is true and will happen."

33-34. But even after Jeroboam heard what had happened to the prophet, he didn't change. He appointed more priests to keep the idol worship going. Anyone could be a priest. These were the kinds of things that led to the overthrow of the king and his family and eventually of the whole country.

Jeroboam and His Son

14 About this time the young son of Jeroboam got sick. So the king said to his wife, "Disguise yourself and go to Shiloh to see the prophet Ahijah. Take along some bread and a jar of honey as a present. Ask him about our sick son." So she disguised herself and went. Because of his age, Ahijah couldn't see who was at the door.

5-6. But the Lord had told him, "Jeroboam's wife is here to ask you about their sick son. But she's disguised herself, pretending to be someone else." Then the Lord told him what to say. When she knocked, Ahijah said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam. The Lord told me that you were coming."

7-8. So she came in, and Ahijah said to her, "Go back and tell your husband that this is what the Lord says: 'I took ten tribes away from the family of David and gave them to you. But you don't respect Me the way he did. He loved Me even when I punished him for what he did, and then he again did what was right.'

9-11. "You have done more evil in your short reign than anyone else, including Solomon. Because of your idol worship every one of your male descendants will suddenly die or be taken captive. They will be taken away like trash. Dogs will eat the bodies of those who die in the city, and birds the bodies of those who die in the country.'"

12-14. Then Ahijah said to Jeroboam's wife, "As for your sick son, as soon as you get back home your son will die. The people will mourn and then bury him. The Lord has seen good in him, so in mercy He will let him go to sleep. The Lord will choose a king who will put an end to the royal

house of Jeroboam. That day has already begun.

15-16. "Israel will be punished for what it has done. And if the people don't change, the Lord will pull the country up by its roots and scatter the people. He will do this because they have turned their backs on Him and put a mother goddess in His place. He will turn away from Israel because the people let Jeroboam lead them into sin."

17-18. Then Jeroboam's wife went back home. As soon as she set foot in her house, her son died. The people mourned and then they buried him, just as Ahijah the prophet had said.

19-20. The other things that Jeroboam did are also recorded in the books of Chronicles. He ruled Israel for twenty-two years and died. After his death one of his sons became king.

The Kingdom of Judah

21-22. Solomon's son Rehoboam ruled over Judah and Benjamin. His mother was one of the foreign wives that Solomon had married. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he became king. He ruled for seventeen years. The Lord wanted His people to come and worship Him in Jerusalem. But the people were worse than their ancestors had been.

23-24. There were shrines everywhere. They set up pillars and poles to remind them of their gods. Men and women even undressed in front of these gods, hoping to please them. This is what the Canaanites who lived in the country had done. That's why the Lord had taken the land away from them.

25-27. In the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign the Lord let the king of Egypt come against Jerusalem. He looted the city and took away the

treasures in the Temple and the palace, including all the golden shields that Solomon had made. After the king of Egypt left, Rehoboam replaced the golden shields in the Hall of Lebanon with bronze ones.

28-31. Whenever the king went to the Temple, the guards would take their bronze shields and go with him. The things that Rehoboam did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. All during his reign there was fighting between Israel and Judah. When he died, they buried him in Jerusalem, and his son Abijam became king.

Fighting Between Israel and Judah

15 Jeroboam was still king of Israel when Rehoboam's son Abijam became king of Judah. He ruled for only three years. He did the same wicked things his father had done. But for the sake of David, the Lord let him have a son. David had walked in the ways of the Lord except in the case of Bathsheba.

6-8. There was fighting between Judah and Israel all during Abijam's short reign. The things that he did are also recorded in the books of Chronicles. When he died, they buried him in Jerusalem, and his son Asa became king.

9-13. Jeroboam was still king of Israel when Asa became king of Judah, but not for much longer. Asa ruled Judah for forty-one years, and he did right. He destroyed all the idols and shrines he could find. He even cut down the female idol that the queen mother had set up, and burned it in the valley outside Jerusalem.

14-15. But he did not succeed in destroying every idol and shrine in Judah. He loved the Lord and was faithful to Him all his life. And he did

his best to replace the treasures and the silver and gold that the king of Egypt had taken.

16-17. There was never real peace between Israel and Judah. After Jeroboam, the king of Israel, died, a man named Baasha made himself king. He too made war with Asa, king of Judah, and captured the border town of Ramah.

18-19. Then Asa took the silver and gold from the Temple and palace and sent it to the king of Syria with this message: "Please accept this present, and let's be friends, as our ancestors were. Break your friendship with Israel so that their new king will have to pull his troops away from us to protect his border with you."

20-21. The king of Syria accepted the silver and gold and decided to be friends with Asa. So he attacked the northern cities of Israel and took the land to the north of the Lake of Galilee. This forced the king of Israel to withdraw his troops from Judah to protect the rest of Israel.

22. Then Asa had his people come to Ramah to dismantle the fortifications that the king of Israel had built, and to use the material to fortify other cities.

23-24. The other things that Asa did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. During his last few years he shared his throne with his son because he had a bad foot disease. When he died, they buried him in Jerusalem, and his son took over.

25-28. In Israel things were not good. After Jeroboam died, his son Nadab took over and led Israel even deeper into sin. He reigned for only about two years. That's when Baasha killed him to make himself king.

29-30. One of the first things that Baasha did as king was to kill every member of Jeroboam's family he

could find. This was what the prophet had told Jeroboam's wife would happen if her husband didn't change. He turned the people away from God by encouraging them to worship idols. But Jeroboam had refused to change, so God removed His protection.

31. The things that the son of Jeroboam did in his short reign are recorded also in the books of Chronicles.

32-34. There were periodic wars between Israel and Judah all the time that Baasha and Asa were kings. Baasha ruled Israel for twenty-four years and did all the wicked things that Jeroboam and his son had done, only worse.

Israel's Other Kings

16 Then the Lord spoke to the prophet Jehu, the son of Hanani, and said to him, "Go to King Baasha and give him this message for me: 'I let you make yourself king of Israel. But you've been just as bad as Jeroboam and have led the people even deeper into sin. You knew this would displease Me, but you didn't care.

3-4. "'So I will remove you and your family from the throne of Israel, just as I removed Jeroboam and his family. Those of your family who are killed will not be buried. Those who die in the city will be eaten by dogs, and those who die in the country will be eaten by vultures.'"

5-7. The things that Baasha did are also recorded in the books of Chronicles. When he died, he was buried in his hometown, and his son became king. The Lord had given Jehu this message because of all the evil that Baasha had done. He had even taken it upon himself to kill the family of Jeroboam.

8-10. During the reign of Asa in Judah,

Baasha died, and his son Elah became king. But he ruled for only two years. One day while he was visiting in the home of one of his officials, he got drunk. Then Zimri, the officer in charge of the king's chariots, came in and killed him and made himself king. **11-14.** The first thing he did was to hunt down and kill every man and boy in Baasha's family. The Lord let this happen because of all the wicked things that Baasha and his sons had done. They knew that idol worship with all its wickedness was wrong, but they had done it anyway. The things that Elah did are also recorded in the books of Chronicles.

15-16. One week after Zimri made himself king, the troops fighting the Philistines heard what he had done. They were glad he had killed Baasha's wicked son, but they didn't like Zimri either. So they proclaimed Omri, their commander, as king of Israel.

17-20. Then they stopped fighting the Philistines, marched back home, and surrounded the capital. When Zimri saw this, he went into the palace, set it on fire, and died in the flames. The Lord let this happen because of all the wicked things Zimri had done. This is also recorded in the books of Chronicles.

Omri and His Son Ahab

21-24. The people of Israel were divided over who should be the next king. Some wanted Omri, and others wanted a man named Tibni. So for the next four years there was civil war. When Tibni was finally killed, Omri became king and ruled Israel for twelve years. He bought a lot of land with a hill on it and built his capital there. He called it Samaria.

25-28. But Omri was worse than all the kings before him. He followed

Jeroboam's example and led the people even deeper into sin. This is also recorded in the books of Chronicles. During his last years he ruled the country from Samaria. When he died, his son Ahab took over.

29-30. Now Asa was still king in Judah when Ahab became king. Ahab ruled Israel for twenty-two years and did more evil than any other king before him.

31-33. He married a woman named Jezebel, the daughter of the high priest of Baal. Then Ahab built an altar to Baal in the city of Samaria and worshiped him and the female goddess that his wife, Jezebel, liked. He did more to displease the Lord than all the other kings of Israel put together.

34. During this time some strange things happened. A man named Hiel decided to rebuild Jericho. While the foundations were being laid, his oldest son had an accident and died. When the city gates were being put up, his youngest son had an accident and died. Years before, the Lord had told Joshua that this would happen to the man who tried to rebuild Jericho.

Elijah and the King

17 In one of the mountain villages lived a faithful prophet named Elijah. One day God told him to go to Samaria to talk to Ahab. When he got there, Elijah walked boldly into the palace and said to the king, "The Lord says there will be no rain for three years!" Then he turned and left.

2-4. Then the Lord said to Elijah, "I want you to leave the city and camp by the brook in the valley east of Jordan. You'll have plenty of water, and you'll be safe there. And I'll tell the ravens to bring you some meat and bread."

5-7. Elijah did what the Lord said. He left Samaria, crossed the Jordan River, and camped by the little brook in the valley. The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and the evening. And he had plenty of water to drink. The people prayed to Baal for help, but no rain came. Even the little brook finally dried up.

Elijah and the Widow

8-9. Then the Lord said to Elijah, "Leave the country and go to the city of Sidon on the Mediterranean coast. A widow lives in a little village just outside the city. I've asked her to feed you until the drought is over. She's not an Israelite, but she believes in Me."

10-11. So Elijah left Israel, and when he got to the little village, he saw a woman outside the gate picking up sticks. He said to her, "Would you be so kind as to get me a drink of water?" The woman put down her sticks and turned to go get some water. Elijah called to her and asked, "Could you bring me a piece of bread, too?"

12. She replied, "I don't have one piece of bread in the house. All I have is a little flour and oil. I'm gathering these sticks to build a fire so that my little boy and I can have one last meal and then wait to die."

13-14. Elijah said, "Make a little bread for me, then make some for yourself and your son. The God of Israel has given me a message for you. Your flour and oil will last until the drought is over."

15-16. The woman believed Elijah. She made a little bread and brought it to him. Then she went back home, and her containers had the same amount of flour and oil in them as before. She ran back to Elijah and invited him to stay with her. The flour and oil never ran out, just as the Lord had said.

The Widow's Little Boy

17-18. Some time later the woman's little boy got sick and died. The widow was heartbroken and said to Elijah, "What does the Lord have against me to let this happen?"

19-20. Elijah said, "Bring the child to me." So she went and brought his body to Elijah. Then Elijah took the little fellow upstairs and laid him on the bed. He knelt down and prayed, "O Lord, You have been so kind. But what will this woman's neighbors think about Your prophet's coming here and then her son's dying?"

21-22. Elijah was really worried about God's reputation. So he laid on top of the little boy's body, pleading with God to give the child his life back. He did this three times. The Lord heard Elijah's prayer, and the little boy started to breathe.

23-24. Then Elijah carried him downstairs to his mother and said, "Look! Your son is alive!" The woman could hardly believe it. She took her son in her arms and said, "Now I know that you're a real prophet of the Lord and that your God can do anything."

Elijah and the King

18 In the third year of the drought, the Lord said to Elijah, "Go back to Israel and tell Ahab that I'm ready to send rain." So Elijah said goodbye to the widow and her son and went back home. The drought around Samaria was really bad. There was not much food left.

3. About the same time, Ahab had asked Obadiah, the official in charge of the palace, to help him find some food for his horses. Obadiah was a faithful believer in the Lord.

4. But Jezebel was so angry with Elijah that she killed anyone who openly supported him, including the

young men who had studied under him. Obadiah had saved 100 of these students by hiding them in two caves and feeding them.

5-6. The king said to Obadiah, "Come, let's go find some springs and grass for my horses." So they divided an area, the king going one way and Obadiah the other.

7-10. As Obadiah was riding along, he saw Elijah and called out, "Elijah! Is that you?" Elijah said, "Yes, it's me! Go and tell the king that I want to see him." Obadiah said, "Do you want me to get killed? He'll think I've known all along where you were. He's been looking everywhere for you. He's even asked other countries to help find you.

11-12. "And you're asking me to tell the king where you are? Even if I go get him, how do I know that you'll still be here when we come back? Maybe the Lord will take you away. Then what? If you're not here, the king will think that I lied, and he'll kill me. I've been true to the Lord all the time you've been gone.

13-14. "Maybe you haven't heard. Jezebel killed all those who supported you, including many of your students. But I hid 100 of them in two caves and have been feeding them. Now you want me to tell the king that I know where you've been? He'll kill me!"

15-17. Elijah replied, "As the Lord lives, I'll stay right here. So when the king comes, he'll have no reason to kill you. You'll be safe." So Obadiah went to find Ahab and told him where Elijah was. The king went with Obadiah, and when he saw Elijah, he said, "So there you are, you troublemaker!"

18-19. Elijah said, "I'm not a troublemaker; you are! You have turned away from God and are worshiping Baal! Go and ask the people to meet me at

Mount Carmel. Bring with you the prophets of Baal and of the female goddess that Jezebel worships."

Elijah on Mount Carmel

20. The king did what Elijah said. He sent word to the people to come to Mount Carmel. He took the prophets of Baal along, but not the prophets of the female goddess.

21. When they all got there, Elijah said to the people, "When will you make up your minds? If the Lord is God, follow Him. If Baal is God, then follow him." The people just stood there and said nothing.

22-23. Elijah said, "I'm the only prophet of the Lord left. But Baal has lots of them. Bring me two young bulls. Let Baal's prophets choose one, and I'll take the other. Let them build an altar and sacrifice their bull, but not light the fire. Then I'll repair the altar of the Lord and do the same.

24-25. "Let them pray to Baal, and I'll pray to the Lord. The one who sends fire is the real God." The people agreed. Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "You go first, but don't light the fire yourselves."

26. They agreed. They picked one of the bulls and sacrificed it. Then they prayed to Baal, "O Baal, send down fire on the sacrifice we brought you!" But no fire came. They shouted their prayers, but nothing happened. They danced and jumped around the sacrifice, but there was still no answer.

27-29. This went on all morning. At noon Elijah said, "Maybe you have to shout louder so Baal can hear you. Or maybe he's busy or on a trip. Maybe he's sleeping." So they shouted louder, jumped harder, and even cut themselves to draw blood. They kept

this up all afternoon, but there was still no answer.

30-31. Then Elijah said to the people, "Come closer. Don't stand so far away." So they came closer and watched Elijah repair the Lord's altar. He picked out twelve stones to finish the top and then said to the people, "These twelve stones represent the twelve tribes of Israel."

32-33. Then he dug a trench around the altar, put wood on it, sacrificed the young bull, and laid its pieces on the wood. Then he said to the people, "Go to the Kishon spring and get four large containers of water. Bring them here and pour the water on the sacrifice." They did.

34-35. Elijah said, "Do it a second time." So they did. Then he said, "Do it one more time." They did it again. Altogether they poured twelve large containers of water on the sacrifice and the wood. The water ran down the altar and even filled the trenches.

36-37. By this time it was near evening. Elijah stepped up to the altar, raised his hands in prayer, and said, "O Lord, You are the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Let the people know who You are and that I'm Your servant. Please, answer my prayer, Lord, so that the people will see Your power and give their hearts to You."

38-39. No sooner had Elijah finished his prayer than fire came down from heaven and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, and even the stones, also licking up the water in the trenches. When the people saw this, they fell on their knees and cried out, "The Lord is God! The Lord is God!" But the prophets of Baal were stubborn and refused to change.

40. Then Elijah said to the people, "Quick! Grab them! Don't let them get away!" The people took the prophets

of Baal down to the valley, where they killed them.

The Drought Ends

41-42. King Ahab had watched everything. Elijah said to him, "You haven't eaten all day. You'd better eat something before you go back. Hurry, because the rains are coming, and it's going to pour." So the king ate something while Elijah went back up the mountain and prayed.

43. Then he said to his servant, "Go look out over the sea and come back to tell me what you see." The servant went and looked, but saw nothing unusual. He came back and told Elijah that there was no sign of rain. Elijah told him to go back again.

44. This happened seven times. The seventh time the servant saw a tiny black cloud in the distance no bigger than a man's fist. He raced back and told Elijah what he had seen. Elijah said, "Quick! Tell the king to get into his chariot and head for home before the rains come and the valley floods."

45-46. Soon the sky was full of dark clouds, the wind blew, and it began to pour. The king had jumped into his chariot and was headed for his closest palace. Then the power of the Holy Spirit came on Elijah, and he ran ahead of the king's chariot, guiding the horses through the storm for more than twenty miles to Jezreel.

Elijah Goes to Sinai

19 When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel everything that Elijah had done and that all the prophets of Baal had been killed. Then Jezebel sent a servant to find Elijah and give him this message: "May the gods strike me dead if by tomorrow morning I don't hunt you down and kill you."

3. That night the servant found Elijah fast asleep outside the city wall. He woke him up and told him what Jezebel had said. Elijah was afraid. He and his servant left as fast as they could. Days later they got to the city of Beersheba, on the edge of the wilderness. Elijah said to his servant, "You stay here, but I'm going on to Sinai."

4. About noon the next day he saw a small tree that would give him some shade. He slumped to the ground and prayed, "Lord, please let me die. I can't go on anymore. Besides, I'm no better than my ancestors. I did great things for You on Mount Carmel, and then I ran from Jezebel."

5-6. Exhausted and disappointed, he fell asleep. A little later an angel woke him up and gently said, "Elijah, I've brought you something to eat." Then he disappeared. Elijah opened his eyes and saw some freshly baked bread over hot coals and beside it a jug of water. He sat up and ate, then fell asleep again.

7-8. A little later the angel came back and said, "Elijah, you've got a long way to go. So I've brought you some more food." Then he disappeared. Elijah got up, ate again, and then felt strong enough to be on his way. That food kept him going for the next forty days, until he got to Mount Sinai.

9. When he got there, he went into one of the caves, hoping to spend the night. Then the Lord said to him, "Elijah, what are you doing here?"

10. Elijah said, "I'm safe here. I've been very zealous for You, Lord, and did my best to get the people to come back to You. They've been very bad, even killing Your prophets. It looked as if I had started a revival, but it didn't change Jezebel. She's still out to kill any prophet she can find, including me."

11. The Lord said, "Go and stand at the entrance of the cave." Elijah went out, and as he stood there, a powerful wind hit the side of the mountain with such force that it broke off some of the rocks. But the Lord was not in the wind. Then an earthquake shook the mountain, but the Lord was not in the earthquake, either.

12. Then flames of fire came down and scorched the side of the mountain. Elijah ran back into the cave for protection. But the Lord was not in the fire. Suddenly it was very still, and Elijah heard a quiet, gentle voice. It was the voice of the Lord.

13-14. When Elijah heard that voice, he covered his face with his robe and went back out to the entrance of the cave. The Lord said, "What are you doing here?" Elijah said, "I was zealous for You because the people have broken Your covenant and killed Your prophets, and now they're after me."

15-16. The Lord quietly said, "I want you to go back to Israel the same way you came. Go on north to Damascus in Syria and anoint a man named Hazael king of that country. Then come back to Israel and anoint Jehu, one of Ahab's officers, as the new king of Israel. Next, go to the city of Jezreel and anoint Elisha to take your place."

17-18. Not long after that, Hazael will attack Israel from the north. Jehu will kill anyone from Ahab's family who escapes. And Elisha will pronounce the death sentence on those who escape from Jehu. But you need to know that there are thousands in Israel who are loyal to Me and don't worship Baal or kiss his image."

Elijah and Elisha

19. So Elijah went back to Beersheba, took his servant, and headed north. He anointed Hazael and Jehu and

then went to find Elisha. He found him plowing with oxen in the field. Elisha went to greet him. But Elijah didn't say anything; he just took off his robe and threw it over Elisha's shoulders and then walked away.

20. Elisha was stunned for a moment; then he left his oxen with the other men and ran after Elijah. He said, "I know what this means. But first, let me say goodbye to my parents, and then I'll come with you." Elijah said, "Go back to your plowing. Why would you want to be a prophet?"

21. Elisha decided not to take time to say goodbye, but to follow Elijah right then. Before he left, he sacrificed the two oxen as a sign of his acceptance of the call to ministry. He roasted some of the meat and shared it with Elijah and the servants. He told the servants to take the rest of the meat home; then he left with Elijah to be his assistant.

War with Syria

20 Now King Benhadad of Syria called up his troops and with the help of the local leaders marched on Samaria. He sent messengers to Ahab, saying, "Give me all the silver and gold in your palace, plus the best of your family to serve me. These are my terms of peace." Ahab said, "I accept the terms of peace. The king can take whatever he wants."

5-6. The messengers took Ahab's response back to the king of Syria, who sent this message back: "That's good, but this means that my officers will go through not only your palace but also the houses of your officials and take what they want."

7-8. Ahab told the messengers to wait in the foyer while he sought counsel. He said to the leaders, "I agreed to the terms of peace, and now the king of

Syria has made new demands. What should I do?" They said, "Don't accept them. He'll only ask for more."

9-10. So Ahab called the messengers back in and said, "Tell the king of Syria that I still accept the old terms of peace, but not the new ones." The next day Benhadad sent this message back: "We're ready to attack. There are so many of us that we'll wipe you off the face of the earth."

11-12. Ahab sent back this message: "A soldier boasts after the battle, not before." When Benhadad heard that, he ordered his troops and those helping him to get into position to attack. **13.** Then a prophet came to Ahab and told him, "The Lord says, 'Don't be afraid of the king's huge army. I will deliver them into your hands. You will know that I am the Lord and that I want My people to come back to Me.'"

14. Ahab replied, "Who will attack first?" The prophet answered, "The Lord says, 'The young men in your special forces will.'" Ahab asked, "But who will lead them?" The prophet answered, "You will."

15. So Ahab called the young men and their officers together. There were only 232 of them. Then he called up all the fighting men in Israel, and there were about 7,000 of them. Ahab explained the battle plan, saying that he would personally lead them.

16-18. He decided to attack at noon when the Syrian king and his allies were resting from the heat and drinking. The young men in Ahab's special forces went first. The Syrian scouts saw a small attachment coming and told their king. Benhadad ordered his men to take them alive, whether they were coming to negotiate peace or to make war.

19-20. The men in Ahab's special forces led the way, followed by the rest of the army. They attacked the

Syrian scouts and killed them without losing a man.

21. When the rest of the Syrian troops saw that, they turned and ran. Ahab's men headed for the king's tent. But Benhadad and those with him jumped on their horses and got away. Then Ahab's men went after the Syrian army, defeated them, and captured many horses and chariots.

22. After the battle, the prophet came back and said to Ahab, "You need to build up your forces as quickly as you can, because in the spring the Syrians will come back."

23-25. When the king of Syria got back home, his advisers said, "The reason you were defeated is that the God of Israel is the God of the mountains, not the God of the open field. So replace the men and the horses and chariots that you lost. Train your men to fight on the open field, and you'll defeat the Israelites." The king listened and agreed.

26-27. By spring the Syrian troops were ready to fight. So Benhadad marched against one of the smaller cities of Israel and took it. Then Ahab put his men into two groups and marched out to the battle zone. They looked like two small flocks of goats compared to the thousands of Syrians who covered the countryside.

28. Again the prophet came to see Ahab, and told him, "The Lord says, 'Because the Syrians think that I'm the God of the mountains and not the God of the open field, I will deliver them into your hands. Once again you will see that I am the Lord.'"

29-30. For seven days the armies just looked at each other. Then the Israelites attacked and killed thousands of Syrians. Some of them ran back to the little city they had taken and climbed up on its walls to keep

an eye on Ahab's troops. But the city walls collapsed, and many more died. Then the Syrian king and his friends ran and hid in a house.

Ahab Makes Peace

31. The Syrian officers said to the king, "We've heard that the kings of Israel are merciful. Let us go to Ahab with ropes around our necks as a sign of surrender and ask for mercy." The king let them go.

32. So they wrapped ropes around their necks and went to meet Ahab. They said to him, "We beg for mercy. And please let our king live." Ahab said, "You mean he's still alive? Good, then he's my brother."

33. The men saw this as a sign of mercy and said, "Yes, your brother is alive and well." Ahab said, "Go get him." When Benhadad came, Ahab invited him up in his chariot.

34. Benhadad said, "As a sign of peace I will give you back all the cities my father took from you. Also you can come and set up your markets in Damascus as my father did in Samaria." Ahab responded, "On that basis I'll let you live." So they shook hands, made peace, and Ahab let him go.

Ahab and the Prophet

35-36. Then the Lord said to one of the young prophets, "Ask someone you know to hit you with a weapon on the side of your face so that you bleed." He asked a friend, but the man refused. The prophet said, "Because you didn't listen, the Lord will not protect you, and you will die." When the man left town, a lion attacked him, and he died.

37-38. The young prophet asked someone else he knew to hit him with a weapon to make the side of his face bleed. The man did. Then

the young prophet bandaged his face, disguised himself, and stood by the side of the road waiting for Ahab.

39. When the king came riding along, the young prophet stopped him and said, "Your Majesty, one of your officers asked me to guard a prisoner. He told me that if I let him get away, I would pay for it with my life or with 1,000 pieces of silver.

40. "When I wasn't looking, he got away. If the officer finds me, he'll kill me. I don't have enough money to pay my way out of it. What should I do?" The king said, "You brought the sentence on yourself. You'll have to pay for it with your life."

41-43. Then the young prophet ripped the bandages off his face, and Ahab recognized him. He said to the king, "This is what the Lord says: 'You let your prisoner go when he should have been put to death, so you'll have to pay for it with your life.'" When Ahab heard that, he was really shaken, and went back home bitter and angry.

Ahab and the Vineyard

21 There was a vineyard close to Ahab's palace in Jezreel that he really liked. It belonged to a man named Naboth. One day Ahab went to see him and said, "Let me buy your vineyard that's close to my palace. I'll pay you whatever you ask for it, or I'll give you a better one somewhere else."

3-4. Naboth answered, "This vineyard has been in our family for generations. It's special to us. I wouldn't feel right about selling it." So Ahab went back to the palace feeling sorry for himself. He lay on the couch and refused to eat.

5-7. Jezebel came in and asked him what was wrong. He said, "I talked to

Naboth about his vineyard and offered to buy it, but he wouldn't sell it." Jezebel said, "You're the king. Stop feeling sorry for yourself and come and eat. I'll solve the problem and get the vineyard for you."

8-10. So she wrote a letter in the king's name and sent it to the city fathers. It said, "I want you to announce a day of fasting and prayer. Have Naboth sit up front with you. Also, find some men you can pay to lie. Have them accuse him of cursing God and the king for declaring this day of fasting and prayer. Then have him stoned."

11-13. The city fathers did what Jezebel said. They announced a day of fasting and prayer and had Naboth sit up front with them. At the right time the two liars stood up, pointed their fingers at Naboth, and said, "This is the man who cursed God and the king for this day!" So the city fathers told the people to stone Naboth to death.

14-16. When it was over, they sent word to Jezebel that Naboth was dead. Jezebel then went to Ahab, who was still on the couch feeling sorry for himself. She said, "I think you'd like to know that Naboth cursed God and you. So the people stoned him to death." When Ahab heard that, he got up and went to claim the vineyard.

Elijah Visits Ahab

17-18. The Lord knew all about what had happened. So He said to Elijah, "I want you to go to see Ahab. He's at his palace in Jezreel. When you get there, he'll be in Naboth's vineyard ready to claim it.

19. "Give him this message for Me: 'First you had an innocent man killed, and now you want to take his property. Because of this you will die, and

the dogs will lick your blood where they licked his.'"

20. So Elijah went and found Ahab in the vineyard, as the Lord had said. When Ahab saw Elijah, he said, "Well, how's my enemy? How did you find me?" Elijah answered, "The Lord sent me here because you've sold yourself out to the devil.

21-22. "This is what the Lord says: 'I have decided to end your reign, and not one man related to you will survive. Your royal family will disappear like the royal families of Jeroboam and Baasha. You've led people deeper into sin and turned against every evidence of My love for you.

23-24. " 'As for Jezebel, dogs will eat her body in the streets right in front of her palace. Those of the royal family who die in the city will not be buried, and dogs will eat their bodies. Those who die in the country will be eaten by vultures.'"

25-26. No one in Israel had ever done such wicked things as Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. They worshiped Baal and the other idols with more enthusiasm and zeal than the pagans who had lived in the country before.

27. When Ahab heard this message, he tore his robe in grief and fasted and prayed. He repented and truly humbled himself.

28-29. Then the Lord said to Elijah, "Go and give Ahab this message for me: 'I have seen your sorrow for sin and how you've humbled yourself. Because of this, I will not carry out my punishment on you or your family while you're still king. But I will carry it out when your son becomes king.'" So Elijah went and told Ahab what the Lord had said.

Jehoshaphat of Judah went to see Ahab. They were relatives, because his son had married Ahab's daughter.

3. During the banquet Ahab said to his officials, "Why haven't we done anything to get the city of Ramoth back from the Syrians? They promised to return it to us."

4-5. Then he said to Jehoshaphat, "Will you join me to get the city back?" The king answered, "Sure. I'll call up my troops and get the horses and chariots ready. You name the time. But before we go we should ask the Lord to see if He wants us to go or not."

6. So the two kings with their officials moved to the open square by the city gate, and Ahab sent for his prophets. When they came, Ahab asked, "Should we go and take the city of Ramoth or not?" They answered, "Go and take it. The Lord is with you. He'll give you the victory."

7-9. Then Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there a real prophet of the Lord around?" Ahab replied, "Yes, his name is Micaiah, but I don't trust him. He never says anything good about me." The king answered, "We should see what he says, too." So Ahab asked one of his officers to go and get Micaiah.

10-12. Meanwhile Ahab's prophets were saying good things about him. Then one of them took two iron horns and said, "This is what the Lord says: 'These two horns represent the kings of Israel and Judah. Just as a bull uses his horns to kill, so these two kings will destroy the Syrian army.'"

All the other prophets said the same thing. **13.** When the officer got to Micaiah's house, he said to him, "Ahab wants to see you. His prophets told him and the king of Judah to go and take back the city of Ramoth, and the Lord would help him. I suggest that you say the same thing."

False Prophets

22 For three years there was peace between Israel and Syria. About this time King

14-16. Micaiah responded, "I will say only what God tells me to say." So he went with the officer. When he arrived, Ahab asked him, "Should we go against the Syrians or not?" Micaiah answered, "You've already decided to go. So go ahead and see what happens." Ahab demanded, "How many times have I told you not to play games with me! Tell me the truth."

17-18. Micaiah replied, "The Lord gave me a vision, and I saw the army of Israel scattered over the hills like sheep without a shepherd. Then the Lord said to me, 'These men have lost their leader.'" Ahab turned and said to Jehoshaphat, "Didn't I tell you that he never says anything good about me?"

19-20. Micaiah prophesied, "In that vision I saw the Lord sitting on His throne surrounded by angels. He said to them, 'What do you think about Ahab? What should we do to stop his wickedness?' One said this and another that."

21-23. "Then an evil angel came and asked to speak. He said, 'I'll make Ahab go to war.' The Lord asked, 'How will you do that?' He replied, 'I will make his prophets lie to him.' The Lord said, 'I won't stop you.' So, you see, your prophets are lying to you."

24-25. One of Ahab's prophets went over and slapped Micaiah in the face and said, "Since when has the Lord talked only to you?" Micaiah replied, "You'll find out whom the Lord is speaking to when you have to hide to keep from being killed."

26-28. Then Ahab said to his officers, "Take Micaiah to the mayor of the city. Tell him to throw this man into prison and give him nothing but bread and water until I get back." Micaiah responded, "If you come back alive, then the Lord hasn't spoken through me." Then Micaiah said

to everyone, "Mark my words. Don't forget what I said."

Ahab Dies in Battle

29-30. So Ahab and Jehoshaphat joined forces and marched toward Ramah to fight the Syrians. Ahab said to the king, "I want to take part in the battle. I'll disguise myself as a chariot fighter. But you need to keep on your royal robes so that the men will have one king to look to." Jehoshaphat agreed.

31-33. Now, the king of Syria had told his officers to go after Ahab, no matter what. So they ordered their men to break through the Israelite lines and go after the king. When the troops saw a king, they shouted, "There he is! Get him!" Jehoshaphat cried to the Lord for help. The Syrians realized that it was the king of Judah and turned back.

34. During the battle a Syrian soldier shot an arrow at random and hit Ahab in a place not covered by armor. Ahab said to his chariot driver, "I'm hit! Quick! Let's get out of the battle zone."

35-36. The battle lasted all day, but Ahab stayed just behind the front lines leaning against the side of the chariot to hold him up. But he kept losing blood, which slowly ran on to the floor of the chariot. Near sundown the fighting stopped, and Ahab slumped over and died. Then the officers ordered a retreat and sent the men home.

37-38. They took Ahab's body back to Samaria and buried it. Then they washed the chariot by the city pool, and the dogs came and licked up the blood. This is what the Lord had said would happen. Then the mayor released Micaiah and let him go home.

39-40. The things that Ahab had done to beautify the palace and fortify the cities of Israel are also recorded in

the books of Chronicles. Ahab slept with his ancestors, and his son Ahaziah became king.

Judah and Israel

41-44. Now Jehoshaphat had become king of Judah shortly after Ahab became king of Israel. He was thirty-five years old and ruled Judah for twenty-five years. He followed his father's example and destroyed the idols and pagan shrines in the hills around Jerusalem. He was at peace with Israel all his life.

45-46. The things that Jehoshaphat did, such as his military campaigns and his personal bravery, are also recorded in the books of Chronicles. But he did not get rid of the men who served at the pagan shrines.

47-48. During this time the little country of Edom didn't have a king. But it

was ruled by a deputy appointed by Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat also built a fleet of ships to sail to the same places and bring back gold, as Solomon had done. But his ships were badly damaged in a storm and never did sail.

49. Now Ahab's son Ahaziah had asked Jehoshaphat to let his men sail with the men from Judah. But he had refused.

50. When Jehoshaphat died, he was buried in Jerusalem and his son Jehoram, who had ruled with his father, took over.

51-53. Ahaziah became king of Israel when Jehoshaphat was king of Judah. He had ruled with his father for one year before Ahab was killed in battle. He did all the wicked things his parents and those before him had done. He displeased the Lord very much with his worship of Baal.

2 Kings

INTRODUCTION: *This book continues the story of the kings of Israel and Judah. It covers more than 250 years, from the death of King Ahab to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. We learn why God finally had to let this happen and send His people into captivity. God is very patient. But He will discipline His people when they continually disobey Him. The important people in this book are Elijah, Hezekiah, and Josiah.*

Elijah and the King

1 After Ahab, his son Ahaziah became king. The little country of Moab rebelled against Ahaziah's control. One day as he was leaning against a wooden window screen high in the palace, it gave way. Ahaziah fell to the ground and was really hurt. So he sent messengers to the Philistines to ask one of their gods if he would recover.

3-4. The Lord said to Elijah, "Go and meet Ahaziah's men and say to them, 'Isn't there a God in Israel? Why are you going to ask a lifeless idol? This is an insult to the God of heaven. Therefore, the king will never recover. He will stay in bed until he dies.'" So Elijah met the men and told them what the Lord had said.

5-6. The messengers went straight back to the palace. The king asked, "Why have you come back so soon?" They answered, "A man met us along the way and told us to go back. He said it was an insult to God for you to send us to an idol to ask about your future. Because of this you will stay in bed until you die."

7-8. The king asked, "What did the man look like?" They replied, "He had lots of hair and was wearing a covering made of animal skin, with a

leather rope around his waist." The king responded, "That was Elijah!"

9. So he sent an officer with fifty men to arrest Elijah. The officer found Elijah sitting on a hill just outside the city. He demanded that Elijah come down. Then the officer and his men began making fun of Elijah and of God. Again the officer demanded that Elijah come down and go with him to see the king.

10. Elijah said, "If I'm a man of God as you say, then let fire come down from heaven and destroy you and your men." And that's what happened.

11-12. When the officer and his men didn't come back, the king sent another officer with fifty men to arrest Elijah. They too made fun of him and of God. When they demanded that Elijah come with them, he said, "If I'm a man of God as you say, then let fire come down from heaven and destroy you and your men." And that's what happened.

13-14. When the second officer and his men didn't come back, the king sent a third officer with fifty men to arrest Elijah. This officer fell on his knees before Elijah and pleaded, "Man of God, be merciful to me and my men. We respect the God of Israel. Twice fire came down from

heaven and destroyed the men the king sent to you. Please come with us to see him."

15-16. The Lord said to Elijah, "Don't be afraid to go with them." So Elijah went with the officer and his men. When they got there, Elijah said to King Ahaziah, "The Lord says, 'Because you sent messengers to the Philistines to consult an idol about your future, you will stay in bed until you die.'" Then Elijah turned and left.

17-18. Not long afterward Ahaziah died, as the Lord had said. Then his brother Joram became king. This was shortly after the son of Jehoshaphat had become king in Judah. The things that Ahaziah did are also recorded in the books of Chronicles.

God Takes Elijah to Heaven

2 When the Lord was about to take Elijah to heaven, he was at the school in Gilgal visiting the students. Early one morning he said to Elisha, "The Lord wants me to go to visit the school in Bethel. I want you to stay with the students here." Elisha said, "I will never leave your side." So together they went to Bethel.

3. The students saw them coming and went to meet them. Later they said to Elisha, "Did you know that the Lord is going to take Elijah away today?" He responded, "Yes, I know. The Lord told me. But don't tell Elijah that I know."

4. That same day Elijah said to Elisha, "The Lord wants me to go to visit the school in Jericho, too. I want you to stay with the students here." Elisha replied, "I will never leave your side."

5. So together they went to Jericho. The students saw them coming and went to meet them. A little later they said to Elisha, "Did you know that the Lord is going to take Elijah away today?" He answered, "Yes, I know.

The Lord told me so. But don't tell Elijah that I know."

6. By this time it was late in the afternoon. Then Elijah said to Elisha, "The Lord wants me to go to the Jordan River. I want you to stay with the students." Elisha said, "I will never leave your side." So they went to the Jordan together.

7-8. Fifty students followed them. When the two men got to the river, Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and hit the water with it. The river parted, and the two of them walked over on dry ground.

9. After they crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, "What would you like me to do for you before I go?" Elisha said, "I pray that you would let me have twice as much power to work for the Lord as you have had."

10. Elijah said, "I can't decide that. If the Lord lets you see me being taken to heaven, He will give you what you have asked for. But if not, then He has decided not to."

11-12. As they walked along, suddenly a chariot and horses of fire came racing along and separated the two men. A whirlwind picked Elijah up and put him in the chariot, and up it went. Elisha saw it and shouted, "Elijah! I see the chariot and horses!" Then they disappeared into the sky. Sad over losing his teacher, Elisha tore his robe and wept.

13-14. Then he saw the mantle that had fallen from Elijah's shoulders. He picked it up and said, "Let's see if the Lord has given me the power of Elijah." When he got to the Jordan River, he rolled up the mantle and hit the water with it. The river parted, and he walked over on dry ground.

15. When the students saw this, they said, "Look! The power of Elijah is on Elisha!" They ran to meet him and

ever afterward treated him with great respect.

16. Then fifty of them said, "Where did Elijah go? We're ready to go and look for him. Maybe the Lord buried him on a mountain or in a valley somewhere." Elisha said, "He didn't die. The Lord took him to heaven just as he was. You won't find his grave."

17-18. The students insisted, so Elisha let them go. Three days later they came back and told Elisha that they had found nothing. Elisha said, "I told you so. But you wouldn't listen to me."

Elisha's Miracles

19. While Elisha was at the school, the men of the city came and said to him, "You can see that Jericho is a beautiful little city. But the water here is bad. It's made people sick, and has even affected our soil so that we can't grow good crops."

20-22. Elisha listened and said, "Bring me a new bowl filled with salt." When they brought the salt, Elisha took it to the city spring and poured it in. Then he announced, "This is what the Lord says: 'The water in this spring is now healed and will never again make people sick or keep the ground from producing good crops.'" From that moment on, the water was pure.

23. Then Elisha left Jericho and went back to the school at Bethel. As he walked along, a mob of young men began following him. They laughed and made fun of him, saying, "Are you going up to heaven next, Baldy?"

24. Then the power of the Lord came on Elisha. He turned to them and said, "May the Lord punish you for what you're saying." Suddenly two bears came out of the woods, attacked the young men, and hurt them pretty badly. After that, no one

dared make fun of Elisha's ministry.

25. Then Elisha went on to visit the school at Bethel and from there to Mount Carmel, then back to Samaria.

War With Moab

3 When Joram became king of Israel, Jehoshaphat was still king of Judah. Joram ruled Israel for twelve years and did lots of wicked things, but he was not as bad as his parents, Ahab and Jezebel. The work of Elijah and Elisha had begun to change things. This led Joram to destroy the altar of Baal, even though he continued to worship the golden calves.

4-5. The Moabites had been under Israel's control for a long time. They had to give Israel thousands of lambs each year, as well as the wool from thousands of sheep. When Joram became king, the Moabites decided to rebel against Israel.

6-7. So Joram called up his troops and marched toward the land of Moab to put down the rebellion. He sent a message to Jehoshaphat in Judah, asking him and his son Jehoram to come and help. They agreed, saying, "We are one people. So our horses and chariots are yours too."

8-9. They joined forces and decided to go the long way around and attack Moab from the wilderness in the south. They also asked the king of Edom to join them, which he did. After marching for a week, they began running out of water.

10-12. When Joram heard about it, he said, "What? If that's the case, our three armies are done for. The Moabites will come and wipe us out." Jehoshaphat asked, "Is a prophet of the Lord, who can give us advice, nearby?" One of the officers replied, "Elisha lives not too far from here." So the three kings went to see him.

13. Elisha greeted them and said to Joram, king of Israel, "What do you and I have in common? Why don't you go to the prophets of Baal for an answer?" Joram answered, "I can't do that, because I believe that it was the Lord's plan for us come this way. But it looks as if He brought us out here to die. We need to know what to do."

14-15. Elisha said, "Don't blame the Lord. It was your idea to attack from here. But for the sake of Jehoshaphat, who loves the Lord, I'll see what He says." So Elisha asked his servant to find a harpist to come and play for the three kings while he went to pray.

16-17. As Elisha prayed, the Lord spoke to him, saying, "Tell the three kings to have their men dig ditches all through the valley. By morning they will see the Lord at work. There will be no wind or rain, but the ditches will be full of water. There will be enough for the men and their horses."

18-19. "I will give them victory over the Moabites. They will take all the major cities and will do what invading armies usually do to fruit trees, springs, and fields of an enemy country."

20. So that afternoon the troops dug the ditches, and in the morning they saw water flowing down the valley into the ditches until they were full.

21-22. Meanwhile the Moabites heard that the three kings would attack from the wilderness. So their king called up every man who could carry a sword, no matter what his age, and marched them to the border. As they looked down into the valley, the red morning sun made the water in the ditches look like blood.

23-24. They said, "Look! The armies must have gotten into a fight and killed each other. Let's go down and see." But the kings and their men saw them coming and hid. Then they

launched a surprise attack. When the Moabites saw that they were losing, they turned and ran. But the kings went after them and had no mercy.

25. They not only took all the major cities, but also cut down their fruit trees, stopped up their wells, and covered their best fields with stones. The only city left was the capital, and they surrounded it.

26. When the king saw that, he decided to escape to Syria. He took 700 swordsmen and tried to break through the enemy lines. But as they came out of the city gates, the frontline troops shot them one by one.

27. When the king saw that he couldn't break through the lines, he took his young son to the top of the city wall and sacrificed the boy to his idol god. When the people saw this, they blamed Israel for causing it. Then the three kings regretted that they had attacked the capital, and decided to go back home.

The Widow's Olive Oil

4 One day the wife of a student who had attended Elisha's school came to him and said, "My husband died suddenly, and I'm alone with my two boys. The people we owe money to want to take my sons and sell them as slaves to pay our debts. What should I do?"

2-4. Elisha asked, "What do you have that's salable?" She answered, "Only a little olive oil." Elisha said, "Go to your neighbors and borrow all the jars you can. Take them home, close the door, and let your boys help you pour oil into the jars until they're all full."

5-7. She did what Elisha said. After filling many jars, she said to one of her sons, "Quick, hand me another jar." He replied, "That's the last one." Then she went to Elisha and reported what

she had done. He responded, "Sell the oil to pay your debts. The money that's left is for you."

The Rich Woman's Little Son

8. One day Elisha went to preach in a little city where a wealthy woman lived. After hearing him speak, she invited him home for dinner. She then invited him to stop and eat anytime he was in town.

9-10. She said to her husband, "I can tell that Elisha is a true prophet. Let's add a small upstairs room to the house and put a bed, table, chair, and a candle in it so he can stay with us when he comes." Her husband agreed.

11-12. The next time Elisha came to town, she showed him his room. He thanked her for her kindness. Before lying down for a rest, he said to his servant, "Go and tell the woman to come upstairs." She came and stood by his room.

13. Then Elisha told his servant, Gehazi, to thank her for the comfortable room and to ask what he could do for her. Maybe he could say a kind word to the king or the officer in charge of the city for her. Or maybe she had some other needs. The woman answered, "Thank you, but I have all I need."

14-15. Gehazi told Elisha her response. Then Gehazi said, "She doesn't have children, and she's not getting any younger. Maybe she would like a son." Elisha replied, "Go get her again." This time Elisha spoke to her.

16-17. He said, "You told Gehazi that you had all you needed. But you don't have children. This time next year you will have a son." The woman replied, "Please don't get my hopes up." But before long she became pregnant, and then she had a baby boy.

18-20. When her boy was a little

older, he went one day with his father to help the harvesters. It was a very hot day. Suddenly he cried out, "Oh, my head! My head!" The father said to one of the men, "Quick! Carry him home to his mother." The man did. She held him in her lap, but he didn't move, and by noon he was dead.

21-24. She took him to Elisha's room, laid him on the bed, and closed the door. Then she called her husband and asked for a donkey to go and find Elisha. He asked, "Why do you want to see him now? It's not the Sabbath. Besides, our son has just died." She replied, "Never mind." So she left and went as fast as she could.

25-26. She and her servant found Elisha fifteen miles away on Mount Carmel. He saw her coming and sent Gehazi to find out if everything was all right. Gehazi ran to meet her, but she would not answer his questions.

27-28. When she got to Elisha, she fell on her knees crying. In her grief she grabbed his feet. Gehazi tried to pull her away. But Elisha said, "Leave her alone. She's in a lot of pain, and the Lord hasn't told me why." Still sobbing, she cried, "Was I the one who asked for a son? Didn't I tell you not to get my hopes up? Now my boy is dead."

29-30. Elisha said to Gehazi, "Hurry! Run to her house as fast as you can. Take my shepherd's rod and lay it across the boy's face. Don't let anyone stop you. Go!" The woman said, "I will not leave until you come with me." So Elisha followed her home.

31. Meanwhile, Gehazi ran ahead, got to the house, and laid Elisha's rod on the boy's face. But nothing happened. Then he ran back to meet Elisha and said, "I did what you told me, but nothing happened."

32-35. When Elisha got there, he went up to his room, closed the door, fell

on his knees, and asked the Lord to please give the boy his life back. Then he laid his whole body on the boy. The boy's body slowly warmed. Elisha got up, paced the floor, and stretched himself out on the boy again. This time the boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. **36-37.** Elisha called Gehazi and said, "Go get his mother." When she came, Elisha said, "Pick up your son. The Lord has given him back to you." She could see that the boy was now alive. She fell on her knees in gratitude to Elisha. Then she picked up her son and left the room, crying for joy.

Elisha and the Students

38. Elisha went back to visit the students at the school in Gilgal. A severe drought had hit the area, so Elisha called a meeting. He asked Gehazi to make a huge pot of stew for lunch.

39. A student offered to help Gehazi, and went out to the field to get some plants to add to the stew. He found some wild squash, took as many as he could carry, and cut them up into the stew.

40-41. After the meeting everyone sat down to eat. But when the students tasted the stew, they cried out, "It's full of poison!" Elisha said, "Bring me some flour." When they gave him the flour, he dumped it into the pot. Then he told Gehazi to give everyone a fresh serving. When the students tasted it, it was good, and no one got sick.

42. While Elisha was there, a man brought the students twenty loaves of bread and some fresh grain from the field. Elisha thanked him and told Gehazi to give it to the students.

43-44. Gehazi protested, "This isn't enough for 100 students." Elisha replied, "Go ahead and serve the bread. The Lord says, 'There will be

plenty to go around, and some will be left over.'" Gehazi did as he was told. The students ate until they were full, and some was left over, just as the Lord had said.

Leprosy

5 Naaman was commander of the Syrian army, a man highly respected for his bravery and victories. But Naaman came down with leprosy.

2-4. A little Israelite girl who had been captured during the war became his wife's servant. One day she said to her mistress, "I wish that the master would go to our prophet in Israel and be healed." When Naaman came home, his wife told him what the little girl had said. So Naaman decided to ask the king's permission to go.

5-6. The king responded, "By all means go. I'll give you a letter of introduction." So Naaman went and took lots of silver and gold, plus ten sets of clothes to pay for his healing. The letter to the king of Israel said, "I'm sending Naaman, one of my officers, to you to be healed of leprosy. He'll tell you more about himself."

7. When the king of Israel read the letter, he was so upset that he tore his robe and said, "Does the king of Syria think that I'm God? Or that I have the power to heal? Why is he sending this leper to me? Is he trying to use this situation as an excuse to start a war?"

8-10. Elisha heard about it and sent this message to the king: "Why should the king be so upset and tear his robe? Send the officer to me and let him see the kindness of our God." So Naaman got in his chariot and went to see Elisha. As he approached, Elisha sent Gehazi out to tell him to go dip in the Jordan River seven

times, and he would be healed.

11-12. Naaman felt insulted and said to himself, "I thought the prophet himself would come out to see me, pray to his God, and then heal me. All he did is to tell me to dip in the Jordan seven times. We have bigger, cleaner rivers back home." He was really upset and left in a rage.

13-14. One of his servants said, "Wait! If the prophet had told you to do something great, wouldn't you have done it? Why not go to the Jordan and see what happens?" Naaman listened, and decided to try it. He went to the Jordan and went under the water seven times. When he came up the seventh time, his leprosy was gone!

15-16. With great joy he went back to thank Elisha. He said, "Now I know that there is no god like the God of Israel. Please let me pay you something for what you did." Elisha said, "You don't need to pay me for what the Lord did. I wouldn't accept it anyway." Naaman insisted, but Elisha refused.

17. Then Naaman said, "Let me take two muleloads of soil back home so I can make a little path and walk on the same ground Israel does. I accept your God as my God, and will never again offer sacrifices to idols.

18. "However, may the Lord forgive me for one thing. When the king goes to the temple of his god, he asks me to go with him so that he can lean on my arm. He's old and not too steady on his feet. And when he bows down, I have to bow with him. But I won't do it to worship his idol."

19-20. Elisha replied, "God understands the situation. Go in peace." After Naaman left, Gehazi said to himself, "Elisha should have taken everything Naaman offered him. I'm going after him to see what I can get."

21-22. So Gehazi took off running.

When Naaman saw him coming, he stopped, got out of his chariot, and asked if everything was all right. Gehazi said, "Everything's fine. Elisha just wanted me to ask you for some help. Two students who are very poor came. Could you let us have 3,000 pieces of silver and a set of clothes for each of them?"

23-24. Naaman said, "Of course! Here—take 6,000 pieces of silver and two sets of clothes for each one." Then he asked his servants to help Gehazi carry it back to Elisha, because it was heavy. When they got near the house, Gehazi thanked them and said that he could take care of it from there.

25. He hid the gifts, then went on to the house. As he walked in the door, Elisha asked, "Where have you been?" Gehazi lied, "Nowhere. I've just been outside."

26-27. Elisha said, "Why are you lying? In my mind I went with you to see Naaman. Is it right to profit from the kindness of God? Is it right to use that money to buy property, have lots of animals, and hire servants? Naaman's leprosy will now be on you and your descendants after you." And that's exactly what happened.

The Floating Ax Head

6 One day the students at the school in Jericho said to Elisha, "Our classroom is too small. We're going to the Jordan to cut down some trees so that we can make our classroom bigger. Why not come along?" Elisha agreed.

4-5. When they began cutting down trees, the head flew off one student's ax and landed in the river. The student cried out, "Oh, no! The ax was borrowed!"

6-7. Elisha asked, "Where did it fall?" The student showed him. Elisha cut a

fresh stick from a tree and threw it in the water. The iron ax head came up to the surface and floated. Elisha said, "Quick! Get it before it floats away!" The student leaned over and grabbed it.

The Syrian Army Blinded

8-10. During this time the king of Syria was conducting border raids on Israel. He and his officers would carefully pick out new places to attack. But each time Elisha would warn the king of Israel not to send his troops near there or they'd be ambushed. This happened again and again.

11-12. The king of Syria really got upset. He asked his officers, "Which one of you has been telling the king of Israel what our plans are?" One officer replied, "None of us, Your Majesty. It's Elisha the prophet. He knows everything."

13-14. The king said, "Get him and bring him here." The officers sent out spies and found that Elisha was living in a little town about ten miles from Samaria. They sent some troops to get him. By morning they had surrounded the little town.

15. When Elisha's new servant went out to get wood to cook breakfast, he saw the Syrian troops with their horses and chariots just outside of town. He ran back into the house exclaiming, "The Syrian troops are out there! They've surrounded the whole town! What are we going to do?"

16-17. Elisha replied, "Don't be afraid. We have a stronger force on our side." Then he prayed, "Lord, open my servant's eyes." The Lord did, and when the servant looked out the window, he saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire.

18-19. As the Syrian troops came into town, Elisha prayed, "Lord, take away their sight." The Lord did. Elisha went

out to meet the soldiers as they were feeling their way along the street. He said to them, "This is not the right city. I'll take you to the man you really want." So they followed him, and he led them to Samaria.

20-22. When they got there, Elisha prayed, "Lord, open their eyes." The Lord did. When the men looked around, they were in Samaria, surrounded by Israelite troops. The king asked Elijah, "Should I kill them?" Elisha answered, "No, we don't kill prisoners of war. The Lord wants you to feed them and then send them back to their units."

23. So that's what the king did. He fed them well and then sent them back. This made such an impression on the king of Syria that he ordered all raids on Israel to stop.

The Siege of Samaria

24-25. A few years later the king of Syria decided to make all-out war against Israel. So he and his troops fought their way to Samaria and surrounded the city. It wasn't long before the people ran out of food, but the king of Syria had no mercy. The people got so desperate that they would pay anything for a scrap of food.

26-27. One day as the king of Israel was walking along the city wall inspecting the troops, a woman called out to him, "Your Majesty! Help me!" The king answered, "Unless the Lord does something, what can I do? I can't make food fall from heaven. What's your problem?"

28-29. She said, "A neighbor woman said to me, 'Let's eat your baby, and then we'll eat mine, to keep our families alive.' I agreed. But when her turn came, she hid her baby and refused to share it with us."

30-31. When the king heard that, he

tore his robe in horror, and the people saw that he had rough prayer clothes on underneath. Then they knew that the king's heart was with them in their suffering. The king said, "May the Lord strike me dead if I don't kill Elisha for not warning me about all this." And he went to find Elisha.

32. Elisha was at home talking to some of the country's leaders. Before the king and his men got there, Elisha said to his guests, "The king is coming to cut off my head. Let's lock the door."

33. Soon the king's officer knocked on the door, but Elisha would not let him in. Then the king demanded that Elisha open the door. When he did, the king said, "I just want you, not the rest of them. I am tired of waiting for the Lord to do something, and you're to blame. The people want action, and I intend to give it to them."

The Siege of Samaria Ends

7 Elisha responded, "Tomorrow the siege will end, and there will be plenty of food." The king's officer said, "That will never happen. Do you think that the Lord will rain food from heaven?" Elisha replied, "Because you doubt what the Lord says, you'll see the people go after the food, but you will not taste it." The king decided to wait and see.

34. Late that afternoon four lepers were sitting just outside the city gate. They said to each other, "Why sit here and die? They won't let us into the city to beg for food, because they don't have any themselves. Let's go over to the Syrians tonight. The worst they can do is to kill us. But they might give us something to eat."

5. When it got dark, the four of them made their way over to the Syrian camp. When they got there, the camp

was empty—not a soldier in sight.

6-7. The Lord had made the Syrians hear a huge army coming with lots of horses and chariots. They had said to each other, "The king of Israel has called the Egyptians to help them. Let's get out of here!" So they ran for their lives, leaving everything behind.

8. That's when the four lepers got there and found the camp empty. They went into a tent and found it full of food. They ate all they could, took the silver, gold, and clothes they found, and ran and hid them. They did the same at the next tent.

9-10. Then they said to each other, "This isn't right. We can't keep this for ourselves. Let's go back and tell the king." So they ran back in the dark and said to the guards, "We went to the Syrians hoping to get some food, and found their camp empty. But everything was still there, including their horses and equipment."

11-12. The guards passed the message on to the palace, and they told the king. He got out of bed saying, "I think this is a trick. The Syrians left their camp, knowing that we would come with our troops to see where they were. Then they will come out of hiding, go around us, and take the city without a fight."

13. One of the officers said, "Your Majesty, let's at least send a few men on the five horses we have left to go and check it out. If they're caught and get killed, they'll die only a few days before we do. The way things are going, we'll soon all be dead."

14-15. The king agreed. So they chose two horses and chariots and at the first sign of dawn headed for the Syrian camp. It was completely empty. They saw a trail of discarded equipment and clothes and followed it all the way to the Jordan River.

Then they raced back to the city and reported to the king.

16-17. When the people were told what had happened, they rushed out of the city gates to the Syrian camp and found plenty of food. The officer who had gone with the king to see Elisha was the one who opened the gates. The people rushed out and knocked him down, and he was trampled to death.

18-20. It happened just as Elisha had told the king. There was so much food that it sold for less than ever. But that officer who had said "It will never happen" died because he doubted God.

The King and the Widow

8 Before the war with Samaria, the Lord had told Elisha there would be a seven-year drought. So Elisha told the woman whose son he had raised to life to find another place to live. She took her son and went to live with the Philistines. When the drought ended, she came back, only to find that someone had taken away her house.

4-5. So she went to see the king. When she got there, the king was talking to Gehazi, asking about Elisha and his miracles. Just as Gehazi was telling the king about the boy that Elisha had raised to life, the woman came in to wait her turn. Gehazi recognized her and said, "That's the woman I've been telling you about."

6. The king asked her to tell him exactly what had happened. So she did. Then she told him that someone had taken away her house, and would the king please order him to give it back. The king said to one of his officials, "I want you to see that this woman gets her house back, including the income from the crops grown on her land."

The King of Syria Dies

7-8. About this time the Lord told Elisha to go to Syria to see King Benhadad, who was seriously ill. When the king heard that Elisha was coming, he said to one of his officers, "Take a gift and go to meet Elisha. Ask him whether I'll get well or not."

9-10. Hazael loaded some camels with gifts and went to meet Elisha. He greeted him and said, "The king sent these gifts and wants to know from the God of Israel whether he'll recover or not." Elisha replied, "Tell him that he's on his way to getting well, but that soon he'll die another way."

11-12. Then Elisha looked intently at Hazael and started to cry. Hazael asked, "Why are you looking at me like that and crying?" Elisha answered, "Because of all the evil you will do. You will be the next Syrian king and will attack Israel. You'll burn our cities and kill our people, even mothers and babies."

13-14. Hazael laughed. "I'm a nobody. How could I ever become king?" Elisha replied, "That's what the Lord showed me." Then Hazael left, and Elisha returned home. When Hazael got back, King Benhadad asked, "What did Elisha say?" Hazael replied, "He told me that you'll get well."

15. The next day Hazael went in to see the king, who was still very weak. He took a thick cloth from the head of the bed and dipped it in water, as if to cool the king's head. But he put it over Benhadad's face and held it there until the king died. Then he proclaimed himself king.

The King of Judah

16-19. In the fifth year of Joram, king of Israel, Jehoram became king of Judah. He was thirty-two years old

and reigned for almost eight years. He did all the wicked things the kings of Israel did. He was led into this by his wife, who was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. But for David's sake the Lord would not destroy Judah.

20-21. Soon the Edomites rebelled against Judah because of the heavy taxes they had to pay. So Jehoram, king of Judah, took his chariots and crossed the border into Edom. The Edomites quickly surrounded the king, but during the night he and his men broke through the lines and returned home.

22-24. From then on the Edomites were free and refused to pay taxes to Judah. Not long afterward others revolted and became free from Judah's control. The things that King Jehoram did are also recorded in the books of Chronicles. When he died, his son Ahaziah took over.

The New King of Judah

25-27. In the twelfth year of the king of Israel, Ahaziah became king of Judah. He was twenty-two years old and ruled for only one year. His mother was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. He was just as wicked as the kings of Israel because of his mother's influence.

28-29. One day he joined forces with his cousin Joram against the king of Syria, to take back the city of Ramoth. During the battle Joram was wounded. He left the battle zone and went back to the palace to recover. Ahaziah stayed with the troops and took the city back. On the way home he stopped to see how Joram was doing.

Jehu Becomes King of Israel

9 About this time Elisha called in one of his students and said, "Here, take this little container of oil and go as fast as you can to Ramoth. Look for a man named Jehu.

He's one of the king's top officers. When you find him, tell him that you have a message from me and need to see him privately.

3. "When the two of you are by yourselves, pour a little oil on his head and say, 'The Lord anoints you king of Israel.' Then get out of there as fast as you can."

4-5. When the young man got to Ramoth, he saw some army officers sitting outside of a house talking together. He went up to them and said, "I have a message from Elisha." Jehu spoke up and said, "Whom is the message for?" The young man answered, "It's for the commander." Jehu said, "I'm the commander."

6-8. So Jehu went inside the house with him. The young man poured the oil on Jehu's head and said, "The Lord says, 'I am anointing you king of Israel. I want you to destroy the royal house of Ahab and Jezebel for killing My prophets. You should not let one male from that family escape."

9-10. "The royal house of Ahab must come to an end, just as the royal house of Jeroboam did. Jezebel should not be buried. Her body should be left lying in the street.'" Then the young man opened the door and ran.

11-12. When Jehu came out, one of the officers asked, "Is everything all right? What did this young madman have to say that was so secret?" Jehu said, "Nothing important."

13. But the officer insisted. So Jehu said, "All right, I'll tell you. He poured oil on my head and said, 'The Lord anoints you king of Israel.'" When the men heard that, they blew the trumpet and shouted, "Jehu is king!"

The King of Israel Killed

14-16. Now the Israelite army stayed

in Ramoth to protect the city in case the king of Syria counterattacked. Jehu said to the officers with him, "If I'm truly your king, stay with me." Then he got into his chariot and took off for Jezreel to see Joram, who was recovering from his battle wounds, and Ahaziah, who was visiting him.

17-18. The watchman on the wall looked in the distance and shouted, "I see chariots coming!" Joram ordered, "Send out a rider to ask if this is peace or war." When the rider got near the chariots, he shouted, "Is this peace or war?" Jehu shouted, "Fall in behind me!" The man did. The watchman shouted, "The man isn't coming back!" **19-20.** So the king sent out a second rider. When the rider got close to the chariots, he shouted the same question, and Jehu shouted, "Fall in behind me!" The man did. Then the watchman shouted, "This man isn't coming back either! And the driving looks like the mad driving of Jehu!"

21. Joram ordered, "Quick! Get my royal chariot ready!" Then Ahaziah told his men to get his chariot ready too. So the two kings rode out to see Jehu. They met near the vineyard that Ahab and Jezebel took from Naboth after killing him.

22-23. Joram shouted to Jehu, "Is this peace or war?" Jehu shouted back, "How can there be peace? The witchcraft of your mother, Jezebel, is everywhere!" Joram turned his chariot around and headed back to the palace. As he went he shouted to Ahaziah, "This is nothing but treason!"

24-26. Jehu drew his bow, and the arrow hit Joram in the back and went straight to his heart. The king slumped over in his chariot and died. Then Jehu said to the officer behind him, "Stop and get his body and dump it in the vineyard. Elijah told

Ahab that where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth they will lick the blood of his sons."

The King of Judah Killed

27. When Ahaziah saw this, he turned his chariot around and headed for Jerusalem. Jehu went after him shouting to his men, "Let's get him!" They shot and wounded him, but he got away. Finally they caught him and brought him back to Jehu, who had him executed.

28-29. Then Ahaziah's servants took his body back to Jerusalem and buried him in the royal tombs of the kings. It was while Joram was king of Israel that Ahaziah had become king of Judah.

Queen Jezebel Killed

30-31. As Jehu was pulling into the city, Jezebel heard that he was coming. She painted her eyes, arranged her hair, and stood by the palace window. As Jehu's chariot came through the palace gate she called out to him, "You're no different from others who kill kings. Is this peace or war?"

32-33. Jehu looked up and shouted, "Who up there is on my side?" When a couple of servants looked out the window, he shouted, "Throw her down!" So they picked up Jezebel and threw her out the window. Her blood spattered everywhere. And Jehu drove his horses and chariot over her body.

34-35. Then Jehu and his men went into the palace to find something to eat. When they were done, he said to his men, "You had better go and bury her body. After all, she was the daughter of a king." So they went outside, but all that was left was her bones. The dogs had eaten her body and dragged parts of it all over the city.

36-37. They went back and told Jehu

that the only thing left was her bones. Jehu declared, "This is what the Lord told Elijah. Pieces of her body would be found all over the city. That way no one could say, 'Here's where Jezebel is buried.' It happened just as the Lord had said."

Ahab's Sons Killed

10 Ahab had seventy sons. They all lived in Samaria. Jehu wrote a letter to the city fathers that said, "Since King Joram is dead, pick the best son of Ahab and make him king. Then get ready to fight for him." Jehu wanted to see whose side they were on. They said, "If Jehu already killed two kings, how can we stand up against him?"

5-7. So the city fathers sent this message to Jehu: "We're on your side. We will not choose someone else as king." Jehu wrote back: "If you're on my side, then bring me the heads of Ahab's sons." So the city fathers executed the sons, put their heads in baskets, and sent them to Jehu.

8. When the messenger brought the heads of Ahab's sons to Jehu, he said, "Pile them up by the city gate right here at Jezreel and leave them there until tomorrow."

9-11. The next morning Jehu stood by the city gate and said to the leaders and the people, "You're not guilty of killing your king; I am. But you killed Ahab's other sons. Elijah predicted this when he said, 'The house of Ahab and all those who support him will be destroyed.' The Lord has asked me to carry out this prophecy to the full, and I intend to do so."

Ahab's Supporters Killed

12-14. Then Jehu left Jezreel and went to Samaria. At one town along the way he met a group of Ahab's rela-

tives. He asked, "Where are you going?" They answered, "We're on our way to Jezreel to pay our respects to King Joram and his mother, Jezebel." Jehu said to his men, "Take them." So they executed all forty-two of them.

15-17. At another place along the way Jehu met one of the local leaders and said, "Are you with me or against me?" The man said, "I'm with you." Jehu said, "Good. Come with me." The man got in the chariot, and they took off.

18-20. Then Jehu said to the people, "If you think Ahab served Baal, you haven't seen anything yet. We're going to have a big festival in honor of Baal, and I want all his prophets and priests to be there. If anyone is missing and I find out, I'll kill him." Jehu was lying so that he could get everyone in one place and kill them all at one time. He set a date for the feast to be held.

21-23. Then he sent word throughout Israel announcing the time and place for the festival to begin. People who loved Baal came from everywhere and crowded into his temple. Jehu said to the caretaker, "Bring out robes for the worshipers." To the priests of Baal he said, "Make sure no one who worships the Lord is in here. If so, he should leave." They did.

24-27. Then the priests brought sacrifices and offerings, and the worship of Baal began. Now, Jehu had posted eighty men with swords at the doors and said to them, "If you let anyone escape, you'll pay for it with your life." When the worship really got going, Jehu ordered his men to go in and kill everyone there. And they did. Then they dragged the bodies out, destroyed the idol, and set the temple on fire.

28-29. That's how Jehu stopped the worship of Baal. Now, Jehu himself didn't worship Baal, but he did wor-

ship the golden calves that Jeroboam had set up.

30-31. The Lord said to Jehu, "Because you put an end to the royal house of Ahab and the worship of Baal, four generations of your descendants will rule Israel." In spite of this promise, Jehu did not stop worshipping the golden calves, nor did he keep God's commandments with all his heart.

Jehu Dies

32-33. Then the Lord let Hazael, king of Syria, come against Israel and take away some of its territory. He took all the land east of the Jordan River where the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh lived.

34-36. The things that Jehu did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. When he died, he was buried in Samaria, and his son became king. Jehu had ruled Israel for twenty-eight years.

The Wicked Queen Rules Judah

11 When Ahaziah's mother heard that Jehu had killed her son, she ordered all the descendants of David killed. If no one from her family was going to rule Judah, neither would anyone from David's family.

2-3. But Jehosheba, the wife of the high priest, took Ahaziah's little son Joash and his nurse and hid them. Joash was the only descendant of David who was not killed. So Joash and his nurse lived in the Temple with the high priest for six years while the wicked queen mother ruled Judah.

The Boy King

4. The next year the high priest asked the palace guards to come to the Temple. He made them take an oath not to tell what he would show them. Then he brought out seven-year-old

Joash and told them that he was the rightful king of Judah.

5-6. He said to them, "I want those of you on duty this coming Sabbath to divide into three units. One unit will guard the front of the palace, another the back of the palace, and the third unit the entrance to the Temple.

7-8. "Those of you who are off duty, come and guard inside the Temple. I'll give you the shields and spears when you come. After the ceremony I want you to protect Joash wherever he goes."

9-11. The officers agreed and gave the men their assignments. When those who were off duty came to the Temple, the high priest gave them the shields and spears from David's army that were kept there. These men lined up across the whole courtyard facing the entrance, ready to protect their young prince.

12. Sabbath morning the high priest brought out Joash, put a crown on his head, and placed a copy of God's covenant in his hand. He anointed him and proclaimed him the new king of Judah. Then all the people who had come to worship clapped their hands and shouted, "Long live the king!"

The Death of the Wicked Queen

13-14. When the wicked queen heard shouting in the Temple, she went to see what it was all about. There she saw young Joash with a crown on his head and her own palace guards with shields and spears ready to defend him. The people were shouting, "Long live the king!" Then she tore her robe and shouted, "Treason!"

15-16. The high priest saw the queen and told the officers to kill her, but not in the Temple courtyard. They caught her as she was trying to escape through the palace stables and killed her there.

17-19. The high priest renewed the

covenant between the Lord, the king, and the people that they would worship Him and Him alone. Then the people went to the temple of Baal, smashed the altar, killed the priest, and destroyed the temple. While this was going on, the guards brought Joash to the palace, and he took his seat on the throne.

20-21. The people were happy to have a new king, and there was peace in the city because the wicked queen was dead. Joash was only seven years old when he began to reign.

Joash Repairs the Temple

12 Joash became king of Judah when Jehu was king in Israel. He ruled Judah for forty years. He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and the high priest helped him. But there were still some places of idol worship throughout the country.

4-5. Soon after Joash became king he called the priests together and said, "Set aside the different offerings the people bring, and use them to repair the Temple. Work with the treasurers to make sure that the offerings are not used for something else."

6-8. For the next twenty years or so the work went ahead very slowly. Then Joash called in the priests and said, "Why hasn't more been done? From now on I want you to turn the offering money over to me, and I'll use it to see that the Temple repairs are finished." So that's what the priests did.

9-11. Then the high priest put a chest to collect the money next to the altar at the entrance to the courtyard. When the chest was full, the priests would call the high priest and the royal secretary. They would come and count the money, record it, and give it to the men in charge of making the repairs and paying the workmen.

12-16. The money also was used to buy materials. It was not used to buy other things for the Temple. The high priest and the royal secretary did not require a report from the supervisors, because they were honest men. The money that came in with the sin offerings was not used for repairs but went to pay the priests.

The King of Syria

17-18. About this time Hazael, king of Syria, took one of the cities of Judah and then decided to attack Jerusalem. Joash took all the silver and gold in the Temple and palace and offered it to the king of Syria if he would not come against Jerusalem. Hazael accepted it and ordered his troops to return home.

The Death of King Joash

19-21. The things that Joash did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. But when he was old, some of his officials plotted against him and killed him. So he was buried alongside his ancestors in Jerusalem, and his son became king.

Two Kings of Israel

13 It was while Joash was king of Judah that Jehu's son Jehoahaz became king of Israel. He did all the evil that his ancestor Jeroboam had done, and never changed his ways.

3-4. The Lord was very displeased with Israel and let King Hazael of Syria defeat them time and time again. Then Jehoahaz prayed to the Lord and asked Him for help, because things in the country were really bad. The Lord listened and decided to answer his prayer for the sake of the people, even though the king had not changed his ways.

5-6. So the Lord rescued the Israelites from the king of Syria. And once again there was peace in Israel. But the people didn't change their wicked ways. They still worshiped idols, including the carved pole of the mother goddess that stood in the middle of the capital city.

7-8. After the war with Syria the army of Israel was reduced to just fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and only 10,000 troops. The things that Jehoahaz did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. When he died, he was buried in Samaria next to his ancestors, and his son became king.

9-13. Jehoash became the next king of Israel while Joash was still king of Judah. He ruled Israel for sixteen years. He did the same wicked things that his ancestor Jeroboam had done, and led the people even deeper into sin. The things that Jehoash did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. He died and was buried next to his ancestors in Samaria.

The Death of Elisha

14. While Jehoash was king of Israel, Elisha got sick. When the king went to see him and saw how sick he was, he cried. He said to him, "You have been more valuable to us than all the horsemen and chariots in Israel!"

15-17. Elisha said, "Go get a bow and some arrows." When the king returned, Elisha said, "Open the window facing the Syrians and get ready to shoot." He placed his hands over the king's hands and said, "Shoot!" The king did. Elisha said, "That was the Lord's arrow of victory. He will help you defeat the Syrians."

18-19. Then he said to the king, "Take the rest of the arrows and hit the ground with them." The king did that three times. Elisha was upset and said, "You should have done it five or

six times to show that you meant it. Now the Lord will help you win only three victories instead of totally defeating the Syrians."

20. After the king left, Elisha lay back down and died, and was buried.

21. Sometime later the Moabites invaded Israel in the midst of a large funeral. When the people saw them coming, they quickly threw the body into Elisha's nearby tomb and ran. As soon as the man's body touched Elisha's bones, he came back to life, stood up, and walked out.

War Between Israel and Syria

22-23. Over the years the kings of Syria had attacked Israel time and time again. But the Lord would not abandon His people in spite of their wickedness. He did not forget the agreement He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

24-25. Eventually King Hazael of Syria died, and his son took over. Then Jehoash attacked Syria and took back the cities of Israel that the Syrians had taken. Three times he defeated them, just as Elisha had said.

The King of Judah

14 Two years after Jehoash became king of Israel, the king of Judah died, and his son Amaziah took over as king of Judah. He was twenty-five years old and ruled for twenty-nine years. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father Joash had done. He worshiped the Lord, but did not stop the idol worship out in the country.

5-6. After becoming king, he arrested the men who had murdered his father and had them executed. But he did not arrest their sons and kill them, because it was against the law of Moses to do so.

7. When the Edomites attacked Judah, Amaziah fought back and defeated them. He even took their mountain stronghold, later known as Petra.

8-10. Then Amaziah challenged King Jehoash of Israel to a fight. Jehoash said, "Once a thorn bush asked a cedar tree to give his daughter in marriage to his son. But a wild animal came along and stepped on the thorn bush. Don't get proud, or I'll step on you. Stay home and enjoy your victory over the Edomites. Why bring defeat on yourself and your people?"

11-13. Amaziah wouldn't listen. So Jehoash attacked Judah and headed for Jerusalem. The two kings faced each other, and Amaziah was defeated and captured. Then Jehoash attacked Jerusalem, took the city, and broke down a large section of its wall.

14. Before returning home, Jehoash took all the silver, gold, and other valuables that he could find out of the Temple and palace. He also took a number of hostages with him. But he let Amaziah continue as king.

15-16. The things that Jehoash did, including his victories, are also recorded in the books of Chronicles. When he died, they buried him in Samaria next to the previous kings, and his son Jeroboam II took over.

17-18. Amaziah, the king of Judah, lived for fifteen years after Jehoash died. The things that he did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles.

19-20. Some men in Jerusalem laid a plot to kill Amaziah. When he heard about it, he quickly left Jerusalem for another city. But they followed him and killed him there. They brought his body back to Jerusalem and buried him in the section of the city called the City of David.

21-22. Then the people made his son Azariah king of Judah. He was six-

teen years old and had already ruled together with his father. The people also called him Uzziah. When he became king, he took one of the Edomite cities on the gulf and made it part of Judah.

The New King of Israel

23-24. Jeroboam II was the new king of Israel. He ruled the country for forty-one years and was just as wicked as his ancestor Jeroboam I had been.

25-27. Jeroboam decided to take back all the territory that the Syrians had taken. The Lord told him through the prophet Jonah that He would help him, and He did, because He saw how much His people were suffering. He would not let them be destroyed by their enemies.

28-29. The things that Jeroboam did, including his victories, are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. When he died, he was buried in Samaria next to the other kings, and his son Zechariah took over.

Uzziah in Judah

15 While Jeroboam II was king in Israel, Uzziah became king of Judah. He ruled Judah for fifty-two years. Uzziah did what was right, just as his father and grandfather had done. But he did not stop the people from offering incense to their idols. Even so, the Lord did not abandon Uzziah, but helped him and gave him many victories.

5. One day Uzziah did what only priests were supposed to do. He went into the Holy Place of the sanctuary and offered incense, as they did. So the Lord let him come down with leprosy. Then his officials took away his duties at the palace and gave him a separate house to live in. So his son Jotham helped rule the country until his father died.

6-7. The things that Uzziah did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. When he died, they buried him next to his father in Jerusalem, and his son Jotham became king in his own right.

Five Kings of Israel

8-9. It was while Uzziah was king of Judah that Zechariah became king of Israel. He ruled for only six months, but did all the wicked things that his father and ancestors had done.

10-12. A man named Shallum had laid a plot against Zechariah. He followed him on a trip to another city and killed him. The things that Zechariah did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. So what the Lord said about Jehu's descendants came true. They ruled Israel for only four generations.

13-14. Shallum became king of Israel during the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah. He ruled Israel for only one month. A man named Menaham killed him and made himself king.

15-16. The things that Shallum did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. He was very wicked. He attacked one of the little cities that would not accept him as king and killed everyone there, including mothers with babies.

17-19. Menaham became king of Israel during the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah. He ruled Israel for ten years. He also was very wicked and refused to change. So the Lord let the king of Assyria invade Israel. Then Menaham offered the Assyrian king tons of silver to leave the country alone and to allow him to stay on as king.

20. He got this silver from the rich people in Israel by forcing them to pay extra taxes. So the king of Assyria let him stay on as king and withdrew his troops from Israel.

21-22. The things that Menaham did are

recorded also in the books of Chronicles. When he died, he was buried in Samaria, and his son took over.

23-26. Pekahiah became king of Israel when Uzziah was still king in Judah. He ruled Israel for only two years and was just as wicked as his ancestors had been. Pekah, one of his top officers, took fifty men, went to Samaria, killed the king, and took over. The things that Pekahiah did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles.

27-28. Pekah became king of Israel when Uzziah was still king of Judah. He controlled part of Israel for twelve years and ruled all of Israel for eight years, making twenty years. He was as wicked as the kings before him.

29. He refused to continue paying tribute to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria invaded Israel, conquered a number of cities, and took a large number of captives back to Assyria.

30-31. Then with the approval of the king of Assyria, Hoshea killed Pekah, king of Israel, and took over the country. The things that Pekah did, such as his alliance with Syria against the king of Assyria and his attacks on Judah, are recorded also in the books of Chronicles.

32-35. While Pekah was still king in Israel, Jotham became king of Judah. He was twenty-five years old and ruled for sixteen years, plus another four years with the help of his son Ahaz. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but didn't remove all the idol shrines in the country. But he did continue the building projects that his father had started.

36-38. The things that Jotham did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. It was during his time as king of Judah that the kings of Israel and Syria made raids against Judah. When Jotham

died, he was buried in Jerusalem, and his son Ahaz took over.

The Reign of Ahaz in Judah

16 While Pekah was in Israel, Ahaz became king of Judah. He was twenty years old when he began helping his father, and then reigned for sixteen years by himself. He did not follow his father's example, but did evil in the eyes of the Lord.

3-4. He followed the example of the wicked kings of Israel. He even offered his baby son as a sacrifice to the idol Baal. This is what the Canaanites used to do before the Lord drove them out of the land. There was hardly an idol shrine on a hill or under a tree where Ahaz didn't go to offer a sacrifice.

5-7. During this time the king of Israel and the king of Syria attacked Jerusalem, but they could not conquer it. They did take one of the border cities and gave it to the Edomites. Sometime later Ahaz heard that the two kings were planning to attack again. So he asked the king of Assyria to help him.

8-9. Ahaz took the silver and gold from the Temple and the palace and sent them as gifts to the king of Assyria. Then the king of Assyria marched against Syria, took the city of Damascus, executed the king, and took many people captive.

10. Ahaz went to Damascus to meet the king of Assyria. While he was there he saw a pagan altar that he really liked. He sent a miniature model back home and told Uriah the priest to make one just like it and set it in the courtyard of the Temple.

11-14. Uriah did as he was told. When Ahaz came back and saw the altar, he was very pleased and decided to offer sacrifices on it, just as the priests did on the Lord's altar. Then he ordered

the Lord's altar moved to one side and replaced it with the pagan altar.

15-16. Ahaz also ordered Uriah the priest to offer the regular sacrifices on the pagan altar as well as all sacrifices the people brought to the Temple. He told the priests that the Lord's altar should be used only for offering prayers. And Uriah and his priests did as they were told.

17. Soon Ahaz needed another present for the king of Assyria. So he took the bronze panels from the Temple carts, the twelve bronze oxen holding the huge basin, and other bronze items to make up the gift.

18. Then he removed the royal platform from the Temple and closed the royal entryway. He did this because he expected a visit from the king of Assyria and wanted to please him.

19-20. The things that Ahaz did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. When he died, he was buried in the royal tombs of Jerusalem, and his son Hezekiah became the next king.

The Northern Kingdom Falls

17 It was during the reign of Ahaz in Judah that Hoshea became king in Israel. He ruled Israel for nine years and did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. He paid tribute to the king of Assyria who had helped put him on the throne, and also to the next king of Assyria.

4-6. But when Hoshea made an alliance with the king of Egypt and stopped paying tribute to Assyria, the Assyrian king invaded Israel. He surrounded the city of Samaria for almost three years, finally took it, and made Hoshea his prisoner. He also took a lot of people captive and scattered them throughout the Assyrian Empire.

7-8. The Lord let this happen to Israel

because the people had been so wicked. He had brought them out of slavery in Egypt, but they had turned to worshiping idols. They followed the example of the pagans whom the Lord had driven out of the land. And they followed the example of their kings.

9-11. The people built places of idol worship all over the country. They set up pillars for gods and goddesses on tops of mountains and under huge trees. They burned incense to these idols and carried out the rituals of worship just as the pagans had. All this greatly displeased the Lord.

12-13. They knew that the Lord had told them not to worship idols, but they did so anyway. He had warned them again and again by sending the prophets. They would ask the people to turn from their wickedness and to obey the Lord. They would urge the people to listen to the messages that the Lord was sending them and take them to heart.

14-15. But the people refused to listen and turned away from what the Lord said. They rejected His covenant and refused to listen to His warnings. Soon they became like the pagan nations around them.

16. They made two golden bulls and worshiped them. They also worshiped the idol Baal, and set up images of the mother goddess everywhere.

17-18. They even sacrificed their newborn baby boys and girls to these idols. They practiced witchcraft and talked to demons and did every wicked thing imaginable. That's why God took His protection away from them.

19-20. Israel influenced the people of Judah, and they did some of the same things, but not to the same extent. So the Lord turned away from Israel and gave them into the hands of their enemies.

21. Years before, the Lord had sepa-

rated Israel from Judah and had made Jeroboam king. But Jeroboam led Israel away from the Lord and into worshiping idols. The people never changed, and things got worse and worse.

22-23. They persisted in their wickedness and refused to listen to the warnings the Lord sent them. He finally had to step in and do something about it. So he let their enemies invade the country and take the people into exile. They were scattered all over the Assyrian Empire, never to have a country of their own again.

Assyrians Settle in Israel

24-25. Then the king of Assyria had his people move into Israel and settle there. When they first came, they paid no attention to the God of Israel. So the Lord allowed lions and wild animals to attack them, and some of the people were even killed.

26-28. They sent word to the king of Assyria and told him what was happening. They wanted to know how to honor the God of Israel. So the king sent some of the priests back home to teach these people what to do. And that's what the priests did. One of them settled in Bethel, where idol worship was the strongest.

29-31. However, the people kept their own gods and just added the God of Israel. They did not change, but continued to sacrifice their newborn babies to their idols.

32-34. Then they chose priests from among themselves to offer sacrifices to the God of Israel in their pagan temples. They honored the Lord along with their own gods, but did not keep His commandments.

35-36. When the Lord had first brought His people into the land, He had said to them, "Do not worship

idols or offer sacrifices to them. I was the one who brought you out of Egypt. You need to worship Me only and not other gods also.

37-41. "Be sure to keep My commandments, and don't forget the covenant that I made with your ancestors. I will watch over you and protect you from your enemies." When the Assyrian settlers were told what the Lord had said, they worshiped Him but also their idols. And so did their children and grandchildren.

King Hezekiah

18 It was during the reign of Hoshea in Israel that Hezekiah began helping his father, Ahaz, rule Judah. When he was twenty-five years old he became full king and ruled the country for twenty-nine years.

3-4. He did what was right for the Lord, just as David had done. He destroyed the pagan places of worship, cut down the poles of the female goddess, and destroyed the bronze snake that people were worshiping.

5-8. Hezekiah put his trust in the Lord as no other king before him had done, except his ancestor David. He held on to the Lord and kept His commandments. The Lord blessed him in everything he did. Then Hezekiah refused to obey the king of Assyria and serve him. He also defeated the Philistines, as David had done.

9-12. It was while Hezekiah was joint ruler with his father that the king of Assyria attacked Israel. About three years later Samaria fell, and Hoshea the king was taken captive. A lot of people were deported and scattered all over the Assyrian Empire. This happened because they broke God's covenant and refused to obey Him.

13-16. Some years later the king of Assyria attacked Judah. Hezekiah

sent a message to the king, saying, "I've done wrong in not serving you. I am willing to pay you tribute again." The king of Assyria asked for all the silver and gold in the Temple and the palace. Hezekiah agreed, and even stripped the gold off the doors of the Temple and gave it to him.

17-18. But the king of Assyria refused to withdraw. In fact, he sent one of his commanders to attack Jerusalem and capture it. The commander and the two Assyrian officials with him walked up to the gates of Jerusalem and demanded to see Hezekiah. So Hezekiah sent his royal administrator, secretary, and record keeper to talk to them.

19-21. One Assyrian official who could speak Hebrew said to them, "Give Hezekiah this message from the king of Assyria: 'What are you basing your confidence on? On your military power? Do you think you can stand up against me? Are you going to depend on Egypt to help you? Egypt is like a walking stick. When you lean on it, it will break.

22. "'Are you going to depend on your God? You've destroyed all the worship places in the country and want the people to come to Jerusalem to worship. Do you think your God is happy about that?

23-25. "'Come, let's make a deal. I'll give you 2,000 horses if you can find troops enough to ride them. But you can't. You're no match against the smallest part of the Assyrian army, much less against me. Besides, do you think that I've had all these victories without help? No, your own God said that Assyria should come and attack Israel and Judah.'"

26-27. When the Assyrian finished talking, Hezekiah's officials asked him to talk not in Hebrew but in Aramaic.

They didn't want the people to hear what was being said. The Assyrian answered, "This message was not only for you and your king, but also for the people sitting on the wall. If we take your city, all of you are doomed."

28-32. Then he shouted, "Listen to what the king of Assyria says: 'Don't let Hezekiah lead you into thinking that he'll save you. Don't let him tell you to trust your God. Give up, and I'll let you stay in your houses until I can resettle you in my country. We have places just as beautiful, with lots of vineyards, olive trees, and honey. So why should you die?'"

33-35. "Have the gods of other countries saved their people? Did your God save Israel? Can you point to any god who saved his people from the great king of Assyria? What makes you think that your God will save Jerusalem?"

36-37. But the people on the wall said nothing, because they had been told not to. Then Hezekiah's officials went back into the city and made their way to the palace. When they got there, they tore their robes in grief and told Hezekiah everything that the Assyrians had said.

The Prophet Isaiah

19 When Hezekiah heard what the Assyrians had said, he tore his robe in grief and put on mourning clothes. Then he went to the Temple to pray. The chief priests also had on mourning clothes. He sent them with two officials to Isaiah to find out if there was a message from the Lord.

3-4. They said to Isaiah, "Hezekiah wants you to know that today is a day of disgrace for Jerusalem. We are like a mother who is too weak to have a baby. The king of Assyria sent two officials and a commander with troops

to take Jerusalem. These men are very proud. May the Lord punish them for their arrogance. Please pray for us."

5-7. Isaiah replied, "Tell Hezekiah that this is what the Lord says: 'Don't be afraid of the king of Assyria. Don't let his insults scare you. I have heard what he said about Me. I will cause him to hear about trouble back home, and he'll turn to go back the same way he came and will get killed.'"

8-9. Meanwhile the two Assyrian officials got word that their king had taken another city about 130 miles from Jerusalem. He was trying to stop the Egyptian army from helping Hezekiah. When the officials told the Assyrian king that Jerusalem refused to surrender, he sent them back with a letter for Hezekiah.

10-13. The letter read: "Don't let your God fool you. Don't depend on what He says. Haven't you heard what we've done to other countries? Did their gods deliver them? What happened to these people? In some cases they were all killed. The same thing happened to some of their kings."

14-16. When Hezekiah read the letter, he took it to the Temple and spread it before the Lord. Then he prayed, "O Lord, You are the God of Israel. You are surrounded by angels. You created the heavens and the earth and are over all the kingdoms of the world. Please listen to what the king of Assyria is saying about You. We are in terrible trouble."

17-18. "It's true that the Assyrians have defeated all those countries and destroyed their cities. They also took their gods and threw them into the fire, for they were only idols. But You are the living God. You are the God of Israel. Please deliver us from the Assyrians so that everyone will know that You are the only true God."

The Lord's Message

20-22. Then the Lord gave Isaiah a message for Hezekiah that said, "I have heard your prayer. This is my answer to the king of Assyria: 'My daughter Jerusalem tilts her head in scorn at you. Do you realize whom you have insulted, against whom you have raised your voice? The God of Israel!'"

23-24. "'Your messengers have dishonored Me. You said that you have taken many cities; that you have crossed mountains and cut down huge trees to make way for your chariots. You said that you have tasted the waters of many countries, and that no desert or river can stop you, not even the river of Egypt.'

25-26. "'Haven't you heard that I control the nations, and that I planned what would happen before you were born? I was the one who let you conquer the cities you did. The people were powerless. They were afraid. They were like tender plants in the field scorched by the sun.'

27-28. "'I know all about you. I know where you live, and I know your comings and goings. I know how angry you are against Jerusalem and against Me. Because of your arrogance, I will lead you back home the same way you came—as if you had a hook in your nose.'

29-31. Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "This will be a sign to you and your people. This year they will eat from what grows wild in the field and next year what comes from the same. The third year they will sow and grow vineyards again. Your people will flourish like plants in rich soil. Jerusalem will survive because I love My people. I am the one who will do this.

32-34. "As for the king of Assyria, he will not set foot in Jerusalem. He will not shoot an arrow against it, and his

troops will not build ramps against her walls. The king will return home without touching Jerusalem. I will defend her for My name's sake and for the sake of My servant David."

One Angel Defeats an Army

35-36. That night the Lord sent an angel into the Assyrian camp, and he killed 185,000 troops. When the people of Jerusalem woke up the next morning and looked over the wall, the Assyrian army was dead. When the king of Assyria heard that, he left the other city and went back to Nineveh the same way he had come.

37. One day back home the king of Assyria went to the temple of his god to worship. While he was there, two of his sons came in and killed him. Then they left the country, and another son took over and became king.

Hezekiah Healed

20 In the days of the king of Assyria Hezekiah became very sick. The prophet Isaiah went to see him and said, "The Lord says that you should put your things in order, because you will not recover. You will soon die."

2-3. Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed, "O Lord, please heal me. You know how I've tried to obey You all my life, and that I love You with all my heart. I've tried to do what's right and good." Then he began to cry.

4-6. Before Isaiah left the palace, the Lord said to him, "Go back and give the king this message: 'I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will heal you and add fifteen years to your life. Tomorrow you will be strong enough to go to the Temple. And I will deliver Jerusalem from the Assyrians for My name's sake and for the sake of David.'"

7. So Isaiah went back and told Hezekiah what the Lord had said. He also told the servants to make a hot, soft mass of figs and put them in a bandage on the king's infection, and he would get well. They did what Isaiah said, and the king began to get better.

8-9. Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "What sign can you give me so that I'll know that the Lord will completely heal me and make me strong enough to go to the Temple?" Isaiah said, "The Lord will give you a sign that can come only from Him. Do you want the shadow on the palace stairway to move forward or backward ten steps?"

10-11. Hezekiah said, "It's easier for the sun to go down and the shadows to get longer. So let the sun go backwards and the shadow get shorter by ten steps." Isaiah prayed, and the Lord shortened the shadow by ten steps.

The Babylonians Visit Hezekiah

12. After Hezekiah was healed and the Assyrians had left the land, the exiled king of Babylon sent some officials to congratulate Hezekiah on his recovery. They knew about the sun going backwards and wanted to know more about the God who could do that. And they were hoping that Hezekiah would help them fight the Assyrians to get the king's throne back.

13. Hezekiah welcomed the officials, but he didn't tell them about what God had done for him. Instead he showed them the riches of Jerusalem, including the silver and gold in the palace and everything in his armory. There was nothing that he did not show them.

14. After they left, Isaiah came and said, "Where did these visitors come from, and what did they see while they were here?" Hezekiah said, "They came a long way. The exiled king of Babylon sent them."

15. Isaiah said, "But what did they see?" Hezekiah said, "I showed them everything in the palace and everything in the armory. There's nothing that they did not see. I wanted Jerusalem to look good to them."

16-18. Isaiah said, "Now hear the word of the Lord: 'The time will come when the king of Babylon will rise up against the Assyrians and will get back his throne. Then he will come against Jerusalem and take to Babylon all the riches and the silver and gold that you showed them. Even some of your own sons will be taken captive and made to serve him.'"

19. When Hezekiah realized that he had done wrong, he repented of his sin. And when he learned that there would be peace and security at least during his lifetime, he said, "The Lord is kind and full of mercy."

20-21. Hezekiah was the one who had a tunnel dug to bring water from a spring into the city, to form the Pool of Siloam. The things that he did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. When he died, he was buried in Jerusalem beside the other kings, and his son Manasseh became the next king.

Manasseh's Wicked Reign

21 Manasseh was born after Hezekiah had been healed. His father appointed him as coruler when he was only twelve years old. He ruled for a total of fifty-five years. His mother was also a good woman, just as his father was.

2-5. But Manasseh followed the example of the pagans who had lived in the land before the Lord drove them out. He rebuilt all the pagan shrines that his father had destroyed. He built altars to the god Baal and erected poles to the mother goddess, as Ahab had done in

Israel. He even put an altar to the sun, moon, and stars in the Temple.

6-7. He sacrificed his infant son to idols, practiced witchcraft, and consulted spirits, which the Lord had told His people not to do. He also took one of the poles of the mother goddess and set it up in the Temple, even though the Lord had told David and Solomon that Jerusalem and the Temple belonged to Him.

8-9. God had also promised to let His people stay in the land as long as they obeyed Him and kept His commandments. But Manasseh didn't listen, and led the people deeper and deeper into sin, until they were worse than the pagans the Lord had driven from the land.

10-11. Then the Lord said, to Isaiah and the other prophets, "Manasseh has done more wicked things than the pagans who used to live here ever did.

12-13. "Therefore I will let Jerusalem be destroyed, and everyone who hears about it will sit up and take notice. I will use the same measuring line on Jerusalem and Manasseh that I used on Samaria and the royal house of Ahab. I will pick up Jerusalem like a dish and wash it on both sides.

14-15. "I will turn My people over to their enemies, who will attack them and plunder their land. My people have done evil ever since I brought them out of Egypt. They worshiped the golden calf at Sinai and have worshiped idols off and on ever since."

16. Manasseh was very, very wicked. He killed many innocent people, including the prophets who brought him messages from the Lord. He also persecuted and killed those who listened to the Lord's prophets, until the streets of Jerusalem were red with blood.

17-18. The things that Manasseh did, all his wickedness, are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. When he

died, they buried him in a lone grave in the palace garden. Then his son Amon, named after the Egyptian sun god, became the next king.

Amon's Wicked Reign

19-22. Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, but he ruled only two years. He followed his father's example and did evil in the sight of the Lord. He worshiped idols, as his father had done, including the sun, moon, and stars. He turned away from God and did not keep His commandments.

23-26. One day some of his officials plotted against him and killed him in his own palace. Then the people killed the officials and made his son Josiah king. The things that Amon did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. They buried him next to his father in the palace garden, and Josiah became king.

Josiah's Good Reign

22 Josiah was only eight years old when he began to reign, and he ruled for thirty-one years. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, following the example of David.

3-4. In the eighteenth year of his reign Josiah sent his royal secretary to Hilkiah, the high priest, to see how much money the priests had collected from the people.

5-7. He said to his royal secretary, "Tell Hilkiah and his priests to give the money to the men in charge of Temple repairs so that they can pay the carpenters and masons and buy the supplies they need. They're good and honest men. We can trust them."

8-9. Then Hilkiah showed the royal secretary a copy of the book of Deuteronomy that he had found in the rubble of the Temple. When the

secretary read parts of it, he decided to take it to the king. Hilkiah said, "Be sure to tell the king that we gave the money to the supervisors, as he asked us to do."

10-11. Then the royal secretary went and gave the king the message and also showed him the book of the law that Moses had written. The king asked him to read some of it to him. When he heard about the blessings and judgments of the Lord that would come because of obedience or disobedience, he tore his robe in grief and said,

12-13. "This is terrible! Go and get the high priest. Take three officials and go to the prophetess to find out what all this means. The people have a right to know. They haven't heard the book of the law since the days of Hezekiah. It looks as though the Lord is very displeased with us because of what our ancestors have done and passed on to us."

14. So the royal secretary, the high priest, and the three officials went to see Huldah the prophetess, who lived in Jerusalem. Her husband was in charge of the royal wardrobe and the robes of the priests at the Temple.

15-17. She welcomed them, and they told her what had happened. She said to them, "Go back and tell the king: 'Your understanding of the law is correct. The Lord will destroy Jerusalem, just as it says. The people have turned away from Him and have made themselves idols. They have become very wicked. The Lord will put a stop to it.'"

18-20. Then she added, "Also tell the king that because he took what he read to heart, humbled himself, and cried and prayed for the people, the Lord will not destroy Jerusalem during his lifetime. The king will live in peace and then be buried beside the other kings right here in Jerusalem."

Then the men left and took the message to the king.

Josiah Takes Action

23 After getting the message from the prophetess, Josiah called together the leaders and the people and led them to the Temple. Then he read to them from the book, and promised the Lord that he would keep His commandments with all his heart and soul and mind. And the leaders and the people followed his example.

4. Then the king ordered the high priest, his fellow priests, and the guards to clear the Temple of all objects left from the worship of Baal and the mother goddess, and from the worship of the sun, moon, and stars. He had them take these things outside Jerusalem and burn them.

5-7. He also removed all the pagan priests that previous kings had appointed to offer sacrifices to these idols. He took the pole of the mother goddess outside the city, burned it, and spread the ashes on the graves of all those who worshiped her. He also tore down the apartments of the men and women who worked at her shrine.

8-9. Then he sent messages to the Levitical priests from all over the country who had been offering incense to idols to come to Jerusalem. He destroyed the pagan shrines and altars by the gate going to the governor's house. These priests were not allowed to offer sacrifices to the Lord, but they did help in other ways and were supported as the other priests were.

10-11. Josiah also destroyed the pagan altar in the valley outside Jerusalem where the people went to sacrifice their babies. He burned the chariots that had been dedicated to the sun god, and got rid of the chariot

horses that had been stabled in the courtyard of the Temple.

12. The king tore down the altars that other kings had built on the roof of the palace. He also destroyed the altars that Manasseh had put in the two courtyards of the Temple. He crushed these altars and scattered the rubble all over the valley outside Jerusalem.

13-14. He tore down the altars built on the Mount of Olives. These were altars that Solomon had built for the gods and goddesses that the pagan nations around him worshiped. Josiah crushed the stone pillars and cut down the poles of the mother goddess and scattered skulls over the ground where people had come to worship her.

15-16. He even went up to Bethel in Israel and destroyed the altar set up by Jeroboam to the golden calf. He set fire to the poles of the mother goddess, dug up the nearby graves, and burned the bones on the altar before destroying it. Years before, this was what one of the prophets from Judah had told Jeroboam would happen.

17-18. Then Josiah said, "Whose tombstone is that over there?" They said, "The prophet from Judah who predicted these things." He said, "Leave it alone, and also the grave of the prophet who invited him home for dinner."

19-20. Next Josiah went up to Samaria and destroyed the pagan temples. He arrested and executed the priests who were still offering sacrifices to idols, and burned their bones on their altars before tearing the altar down. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

21-23. Back home he asked the people to get ready to keep the Passover again. Not since the days of Joshua and the early kings was the Passover kept the way it was under Josiah. This took place in the eighteenth year of his reign.

24. He also got rid of all the spiritual-

ists and those who practiced magic and witchcraft. He destroyed all the idols in the country; even those in people's houses. He followed all the instructions written in the book that Hilkiah the high priest had found in the Temple.

25. There was no king like Josiah, either before or after him, who obeyed the Lord so fully. He did so with all his heart and soul and mind and strength. He saw to it that all the instructions of the Lord were carried out as they should be.

26. But all this did not change the Lord's mind about Jerusalem. Terrible things had been done there. The king and the people had sacrificed their own babies to idols.

27. The Lord had said, "I will do the same thing to Judah and Jerusalem that I did to Israel and Samaria. I will let the people be taken into exile and will turn away from the Temple they built to honor Me."

Josiah Dies

28-30. The things that Josiah did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. Josiah had decided to help the king of Babylon against the Assyrians and to stop the king of Egypt from coming against him. But he was wounded, and they took him back home, where he died. They buried him in the tombs of the kings, and his son took over.

31-32. Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king. He ruled for only three months. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his ancestors had done.

33. The king of Egypt asked Jehoahaz to meet him at the city of Riblah. When Jehoahaz got there, the king took him prisoner. He also demanded that the people of Judah pay him trib-

ute in silver and gold, which they did.

34. Then he made Eliakim king and changed his name to Jehoiakim. He took Jehoahaz with him in chains and kept him in Egypt, where he died.

35-37. Jehoiakim agreed to pay yearly tribute to the king of Egypt, and taxed the people to get it. He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and ruled for eleven years. He disobeyed the Lord, just as his ancestors had done.

Nebuchadnezzar Invades Judah

24 The king of Babylon controlled the land of Judah, and Jehoiakim submitted to him for three years. Then he rebelled.

2-4. The Lord let the Babylonians attack Judah, and neighboring nations did so as well. This is what the prophets had said would happen because of the terrible things Manasseh and his people had done. He had killed many innocent people. The Lord could not overlook all this bloodshed.

5-6. The things that Jehoiakim did are recorded also in the books of Chronicles. When he died, his son Jehoiachin took over.

7. The king of Egypt had been defeated by the king of Babylon, so he never tried to take control of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar controlled all the territory from the river Euphrates in the north to the river of Egypt in the south.

8-9. Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and ruled for only three months. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, as his father had done.

10-12. When Nebuchadnezzar heard that Jehoiachin had rebelled, he invaded Judah again and surrounded Jerusalem. This time he took charge of the troops himself. So Jehoiachin, the queen mother, and his advisers and officials surrendered. Nebuchad-

nezzar took Jehoiachin as a prisoner to Babylon.

13-14. He also took all the remaining gold articles in the Temple and in the palace. And he took the royal princes, the army officers, and the skilled workers. Altogether he took thousands of people to Babylon. Only the poorest people were left in the country.

15-16. He took Jehoiachin's mother, his family, and all the important leaders with him. He even took men fit for the military back to Babylon, along with the others.

17-19. Then Nebuchadnezzar appointed Mattaniah as king of Judah and changed his name to Zedekiah. He was twenty-one years old when he became king, and reigned for eleven years. He did evil in the sight of the Lord.

20. All this happened to Judah and Jerusalem because the people had turned away from the Lord. Zedekiah didn't learn from all of this, but rebelled against the Lord and against the king of Babylon.

The Destruction of Jerusalem

25 In the ninth year of Zedekiah, the king of Babylon came against Jerusalem a third time. He surrounded the city and sent part of his army to fight elsewhere in Judah. Jerusalem held out for more than two years. By then there was no more food in the city, and people were starving.

4-5. Finally, Nebuchadnezzar's men broke through the thick wall and entered the city. Zedekiah with a few of his men escaped through a small gate between the two walls and headed for the Jordan Valley. But the Babylonians caught up with them. Then Zedekiah's men ran and left the king alone.

6-7. The Babylonians took Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar, who was with his troops at another place. Nebuchad-

nezzar had Zedekiah's sons brought in, and executed them in front of their father. Then he had Zedekiah's eyes put out, and put him in chains to be taken back to Babylon.

8-12. Nebuchadnezzar sent his general back to Jerusalem to burn down the Temple, the palace, and other important buildings. They set fire to all the houses in Jerusalem and tore down the city wall. He took with him almost everyone who was left in Jerusalem, leaving only the poorest of the poor behind.

13-15. He had his men break up the two bronze pillars in front of the sanctuary and all the other bronze items in the Temple. He took all this bronze with him back to Babylon, including any silver and gold items that had not been taken before.

16-17. There was so much bronze from all these things that no one knew how much it weighed. The bronze pillars were more than thirty feet each, with decorated crowns on top.

18-21. The general took the high priest, his associate, and the next three important Temple officials. He also took the officer in charge of the few soldiers that were left, his assistant, five royal advisers, and other important people. He took all of them to see Nebuchadnezzar, who had them executed. Thousands of others were taken to Babylon.

The Governor of Judah

22-23. There were a few people left

in Judah. So Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah as governor. A few of the army officers and their men had escaped Jerusalem just before Nebuchadnezzar took the city. When they heard that Gedaliah was made governor, they went to see him at Mizpah.

24-25. The governor welcomed them. Then he took an oath promising that if they would quietly settle in the land and not rebel against the king of Babylon, nothing would happen to them. But later that year one of the officers and ten of his men went and killed Gedaliah. They also killed the men who supported him, as well as the Babylonian guards.

26. Then all the people who lived there, together with the army officers and their men, escaped to Egypt. They were afraid of what Nebuchadnezzar might do to them.

Jehoiachin Released

27-28. After Jehoiachin, king of Judah, had been in prison for thirty-seven years, the new king of Babylon released him. By this time he was an old man. The king spoke kindly to him and gave him, an honored place among the other captured kings.

29-30. So Jehoiachin never wore his prison clothes again, and he ate in the palace at the king's table. He was also given a daily expense allowance as long as he lived.

1 Chronicles

INTRODUCTION: *Many think that this book was written by Ezra, the priest. It looks at families and how they fit into the history of Israel. It begins with the family of David and ends with his death in 970 B.C. We learn that God directs people's lives and gives them many different abilities. Each person is important. Also we learn that David wanted to build a temple for God. But Nathan the prophet told David that God wanted Solomon to do it. David obeyed and did all he could to get things ready for his son to build it.*

From Adam to Abraham

1 This is a list of some of the names of God's people in the family line from Adam to Abraham. First, there was Adam, then on down the line were Enoch and Noah. Then there were Noah's three sons and their descendants. Later came Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac.

29-54. Ishmael had sons and daughters. After Sarah died, Abraham remarried and had more children. Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Esau also had sons, and they all lived in the little country of Edom. As time went on, his descendants became kings in Edom and leaders of tribes.

The Family of Jacob

2 Jacob had twelve sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher.

3-17. Judah had five sons, and they too had sons and daughters. One of those was Achan, who stole things God said not to touch and brought a lot of trouble on Israel. Other descendants of Judah included Boaz, Obed, Jesse, and David. One of the women was Abigail, who married David.

18-55. Other descendants of Judah included Caleb, who, together with

Joshua, believed that God would defeat Israel's enemies as He had promised. Caleb's descendants included Korah, who rebelled against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. The Kenites were the descendants of the father-in-law of Moses.

The Family of David

3 David had six sons while he ruled Judah from Hebron. Then he had thirteen more sons and one daughter when he ruled from Jerusalem. One of his sons was Solomon, who became the next king, and one of his sons was Rehoboam. It was under Rehoboam's rule that the country split into Israel and Judah. The last king of Judah was Zedekiah. **17-24.** The next-to-the-last king of Judah was Jehoiachin. He was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and imprisoned in Babylon. His descendants included Zerubbabel, a leader who brought many Israelites back home. They had been in captivity for seventy years until Cyrus, king of Persia, defeated the Babylonians.

The Family of Judah

4 Judah was one of the sons of Jacob. One of his descendants was Jabez, whose mother went

through a lot of suffering when he was born. He was a good man. He prayed, "O Lord, bless me with much land and stay close to me. Keep me from harm and help me not to cause pain to others." The Lord gave him what he asked for.

11-23. Some other descendants of Judah were Othniel and Ophrah. All these descendants lived in Craftsman's Valley. Then there was Caleb, who was mentioned before, and all his descendants. They worked in the pottery factories owned by the king.

The Family of Simeon

24-33. Simeon was one of the twelve sons of Jacob. One of Simeon's descendants was Shimei, who had sixteen sons and six daughters. But his brothers didn't have many children. That's why the tribe never got as big as some of the others. In the time of David some of their cities were given to Judah, making their tribe even smaller.

34-40. The tribe of Simeon had many family groups, each group with its own leader. Some of these groups moved west toward the land of the Philistines to find better pastures for their herds and flocks. This was the area where the descendants of Noah's son Ham also lived.

41-43. In the days of Hezekiah these family groups drove out the people who had lived in these western areas and settled there themselves. Other family groups moved south toward Edom, defeated the people who had made war with Saul, and then settled there.

The Family of Reuben

5 Reuben was Jacob's firstborn son. But because of the bad things he had done, his rights and privileges were given to Joseph.

Even so, the tribe of Judah became the strongest tribe, and that's the tribe David came from.

3-6. Among the descendants of Reuben was Beera, a very strong leader. But when the king of Assyria came into the land, he took Beera back to Assyria as his prisoner.

7-10. Some of the Reuben family groups moved north and others east right up to the desert. They needed this extra land for their large herds and flocks. During the reign of Saul they drove out the people who lived in these areas and settled there.

The Family of Gad

11-17. Another son of Jacob was Gad. His descendants lived just north of the tribe of Reuben. This tribe, too, had many family groups with leaders. Joel was the leader of the biggest group, but there were other strong leaders. The records for all this were compiled during the reign of Jotham, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, king of Israel.

18-22. The tribes of Reuben, and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh had thousands of trained men ready for combat who knew how to use the sword and shield as well as the bow and arrow. When they were attacked, they asked God for help. They captured thousands of prisoners and took thousands of camels, sheep, and donkeys. They stayed in the land until the Assyrians came and deported them.

The Family of Manasseh

23-26. The half tribe of Manasseh joined the tribes of Reuben and Gad and settled in the same area. Many of the leaders of family groups were outstanding military men and brave in battle. But they were not true to God, and their people ended up worshipping the same gods the pagans did.

That's why God let the Assyrians come and take them into exile.

The Family of Levi

6 Levi was another son of Jacob. He had three sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. The sons of Kohath, included Amram, the father of Aaron, Moses, and Miriam. The sons of Aaron were: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

4-15. One of Eleazar's sons was Phinehas who was a man of courage. One of his descendants served in Solomon's Temple, and another was taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.

16-30. Gershon had two sons. His brother Kohath had four sons, and his other brother, Merari, had two sons. The tribe was divided into family groups and each group had a leader. One such leader was Elkanah, an ancestor of Samuel. Samuel had two sons, Joel and Abijah. There were other important descendants from Gershon as well.

The Temple Musicians

31-32. After David brought the ark with the cherubim to Jerusalem and placed it in a special tent, he appointed musicians. They took turns serving the Lord at the special tent, even before Solomon built the Temple.

33-48. Heman was the leader of the first choir. His ancestry went through Samuel and all the way back to Levi, the son of Jacob. Heman's associate was Asaph, leader of the second choir. His ancestry also went back to Levi. Ethan was the other associate and the leader of the third choir. His ancestry, too, went back to Levi. The rest of the Levites had other duties.

The Family of Aaron

49-53. Aaron's descendants served as

priests offering sacrifices to the Lord for the people. They were responsible for all services in the Holy Place and Most Holy Place according to the instructions the Lord had given to Moses. The descendants of Aaron through Eleazar included Phinehas and Zadok who served as priests under David and Solomon.

The Cities of the Levites

54-61. Here is a list of the places where the descendants of Kohath through Aaron settled. In Judah one of the cities was Hebron. In Benjamin one was Gibeon. Altogether thirteen cities in Judah and Benjamin were given to Aaron's descendants. Kohath's other descendants were given ten cities in Manasseh's tribal area east of the Jordan River.

62-65. The descendants of Levi's son, Gershon, were given thirteen cities in the tribal areas of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and Manasseh west. The descendants of Levi's son, Merari, were given twelve cities in the tribal areas of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun. Like all the cities, the cities from Judah, Benjamin, and Simeon were also selected by drawing lots.

66-81. Other descendants of Kohath were given cities such as Shechem in Ephraim and also cities in Manasseh's tribal area west of the Jordan River. Descendants of Gershon were given cities such as Golan and Ramoth. And descendants of Merari were given cities like Tabor and Heshbon. All these cities included pasturelands for flocks and herds.

Family Groups

7 Issachar, the son of Jacob, had four sons. The descendants of Issachar's son Tola were known for their bravery. At the

time of David they made up an army of thousands of well-trained warriors. Five of Issachar's descendants became powerful chiefs with their own fighting forces. Altogether the tribe of Issachar had 87,000 men of war.

6-12. Benjamin had three sons, all of whom were leaders of family groups. The records from the tribe of Benjamin showed a total of more than 22,000 men trained for war. All the leaders of family groups were great soldiers with thousands of trained men under them. They all belonged to the tribe of Benjamin.

13. Naphtali was another son of Jacob. He had four sons.

14-19. Manasseh, the son of Joseph, had two sons. One of them married a woman from the tribe of Benjamin who gave him two sons. His grandson had only daughters. But all down the line the descendants had sons.

20-24. Ephraim, the son of Joseph, had three sons. Among the descendants of one of Ephraim's sons were Ezer and Elead. They were both killed when they went into Philistine territory. Ephraim mourned for them a long time, and relatives came from everywhere to comfort him. Ephraim also had a daughter named Sheerah, who built three cities.

25-29. The descendants of one of the sons of Ephraim settled in the city of Bethel and the surrounding areas. They settled as far west as Gezer and Shechem. The descendants of Manasseh, Joseph's other son, settled in a number of cities, including Megiddo. These are the descendants of Joseph, and where they lived.

30-40. Asher was another son of Jacob. He had four sons and one daughter. His sons also had sons and daughters. All these men were lead-

ers and outstanding military men. There were about 26,000 men listed who were trained for war.

The Tribe of Benjamin

8 Benjamin also was a son of Jacob. He had five sons. His sons also had sons and daughters. One of Benjamin's descendants, Shaharaim, divorced his wives and left Israel to live in the little country of Moab. While there, he married again and had seven sons. This was in addition to the two from his first marriage. **12-28.** All down the line the descendants of Benjamin had strong leaders. Each was in charge of their family group. Some of these lived in Jerusalem.

29-40. One such descendant governed the city of Gibeon. Kish, the father of Saul, came from Gibeon. Saul had four sons, one of whom was Jonathan. One of Jonathan's descendants was Ulam whose sons were known for their bravery and skill in handling the bow and arrow. Altogether Ulam had 150 sons and grandsons.

Return From Captivity

9 The family records included everyone in the country. Years later the people of Judah were captured and taken to Babylon because they had been unfaithful to the Lord. Eventually they began to return. In the first group were priests, Levites, and Temple guards and workers.

3-9. People from different tribes came back to Jerusalem. These included Uthai, the grandson of Omri; Asaiah, with his extended family; and Jeuel, with his family group of almost 700. Almost 1,000 families from the tribe of Benjamin came back with this first group.

Priests, Levites, and Temple Guards

10-13. Some of the priests who returned were descendants from Hilkiah, who had served under King Josiah, and Zadok, who had served under David. Altogether almost 2,000 priests who were heads of families came back from Babylon to work at the Temple.

14-16. Some Levites who came back were descendants of Merari, the son of Levi. There were also others such as Berekiah, the grandson of Elkanah, who had the same name as the father of Samuel.

17-20. The Temple guards who returned from Babylon were led by Shallum. They were Levites who had guarded the eastern gate going into the Temple through which the king came. Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron, had been in charge of these guards when the sanctuary was still in the wilderness.

21-24. Zechariah was over the priests. But the guards were under Shallum, and there were more than 200 of them. Their ancestors had been given specific duties by David and Samuel. They were stationed on all four sides of the sanctuary.

25-27. Many of these guards lived outside Jerusalem and would come in to take their turn. The responsibility of the four chief guardsmen included looking after Temple supplies and storage areas. These four lived near the Temple and had the key to lock it at night and open it in the morning.

28-32. Some Levites were in charge of the Temple utensils; others in charge of the furnishings; and still others in charge of the flour, olive oil, spices, and incense. The son of Shallum was in charge of baking the Temple bread,

which was placed every week on the table in the Holy Place.

33-34. Other Levites served as musicians. When the choir leaders were on duty, they stayed in rooms at the Temple so they could be called on any time. According to the official records, all the men mentioned above were heads of family groups and lived in Jerusalem.

The Family of Saul

35-39. An ancestor of King Saul governed the city of Gibeon. One of his descendants was Ner, the father of Kish, who was the father of Saul. Some of them lived in the city of Jerusalem.

40-44. Saul had four sons, the oldest being Jonathan. His descendants included Micah, Zimri, Binea, and Azel, who had six sons.

The Death of Saul

10 When Saul was king, the Philistines attacked Israel again and again. In one battle on Mount Gilboa, the Philistines defeated the Israelites. Many were killed, including Saul and his three sons. During the battle, Saul was hit by one of the enemy archers and severely wounded.

4-5. He realized that he was going to die. So he asked his armor bearer to kill him before the Philistines found him and tortured him. The young man refused. So Saul took his own sword and fell on it. When the young man saw that Saul was dead, he too killed himself.

6-7. So Saul and his three sons and all his other relatives who fought with him were killed. When the men in the nearby valley heard that Saul and his sons were dead, they left the area, and the Philistines moved in.

8-9. The next day the Philistines went

over the battlefield to strip the dead of their valuables. That's when they found the bodies of Saul and his sons. They stripped him of his armor, cut off his head, and sent the news back home. When the people heard it, they went to their temples and thanked their idols.

10. Then the Philistines put Saul's armor in one of their temples and his head in the temple of their main god called Dagon. Also they took the bodies of Saul and his sons and hung them up for people to see.

11-12. When the people of Israel in the city of Jabesh heard about it, they sent their bravest men to get the bodies and bring them back for burial. Then they mourned for Saul and his sons for one whole week.

13-14. The reason the Lord let Saul be defeated and killed by the Philistines was that he had disobeyed again and again. He had even gone to a witch to get advice from demons on what to do. That's why the Lord couldn't protect him anymore. So Saul was killed, and the Lord turned the kingdom over to David.

David Becomes King

11 David first became king of the tribe of Judah with the city of Hebron as his capital. Seven years later the leaders of the other tribes came to see him and said, "We are all one people. Even when Saul was king, you were with us. The Lord told you that He wanted you to be the next king."

3. So they made a covenant with David and anointed him to be their king. This was what the Lord had told Samuel would happen.

The City of David

4-5. Then David decided to make the

city of Jebus his new capital. It was still inhabited by Canaanites. They said to David, "You will never take our city." The city was on top of Mount Zion and was built like a fortress. But David took it and renamed it Jerusalem.

6. Before that, David had said to his troops, "The first man who gets into the city and opens the gates for the rest of us will be my commander-in-chief." David's nephew, Joab, with a group of men, got into the city and opened the gates. So Joab became David's commander-in-chief.

7-9. Then David moved from Hebron to Jerusalem, but the people called it the City of David. He expanded the city to include the Fortress of Millo and asked Joab to repair the rest of the city. David became more and more powerful because the Lord was with him.

David's Warriors

10-14. The people supported David, and so did Israel's mighty warriors. The Famous Three were awesome fighters. Their leader killed 300 enemy troops in one battle. The second of the three stood alongside David against a whole army of Philistines. The third one fought off a small army of the Philistines all by himself.

15-17. Then there were The Mighty Thirty. These men were with David in a cave near Bethlehem when the city was occupied by the Philistines. David longed for a drink of water from home.

18-19. So the top three of The Mighty Thirty broke through the Philistine line, got the water, and brought it to David. When David realized how they had risked their lives, he refused to drink it. He said, "This water is as precious as blood," and poured it out as an offering to the Lord. These were

the kinds of things the top three did. **20-21.** Abishai, the brother of Joab, was the leader of The Mighty Thirty. He used his sword and spear against 300 Philistines and killed all of them. He was very brave and was equal to The Famous Three.

22. Then there was Benaiah. He too was known for his bravery. He killed two mighty warriors from Moab. On one snowy day he went down into a pit alone and killed an angry trapped lion.

23-25. He also accepted the challenge of an Egyptian giant who was seven and a half feet tall and had a huge spear. He attacked him, took away his spear, and killed him. These were just a few of the things he did. He too was as well known as The Famous Three. David put him in charge of his bodyguards.

26-47. Here are some of the names of those who belonged to The Mighty Thirty: Asahel, the younger brother of Abishai and Joab; Elhanan, from Bethlehem; Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba; Adina, a leader among the Reubenites who had his own group of thirty good men; and a man named Obed.

David's Loyal Followers

12 Before David became king, while he was being pursued by Saul, he crossed the border and lived in the little Philistine city of Ziklag. His experienced fighters went with him. The men from the tribe of Benjamin were skilled in bows and arrows, and were under the command of Ahiezer and Joash.

4-7. There were other outstanding fighters, with such names as Beracah, Jehu, and Ishmaiah, who was one of The Mighty Thirty. Others were Jeremiah, Elkanah, and Zebadiah.

8-13. Some of the fighters came from the tribe of Gad. They were skilled in handling swords and shields. They

were as quick and sure-footed as mountain goats. With their big, bushy beards, they looked as fierce as lions. Ezer was their leader with Obadiah next, followed by Eliab, and on down to such men as Jeremiah, Attai, Johanan, and others.

14-15. These men were put in charge of hundreds and some in charge of thousands. One time a group of them crossed the Jordan at flood stage and drove out the foreigners from the valleys on both sides of the river.

16-17. When David was still hiding in the wilderness before he moved to Ziklag, thirty men came from Benjamin and Judah to join him. He said to them, "If you're coming in peace, you're more than welcome. But if you're coming to spy on men, even though I have done nothing to hurt you, God will punish you."

18. Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Amasai, their leader, and he said, "We are yours. Success to you and to all those who are with you. God is on your side, and we know it." So David welcomed them and made them leaders in his army.

19. Also men from the tribe of Manasseh joined David. This happened when the Philistine king in charge of the area where David was living asked him to help fight against the army of Saul. As it turned out, David didn't have to fight, because the Philistine commanders didn't trust David. They sent him and his men back home.

20-22. These men from Manasseh had been leaders in charge of thousands. So when a desert tribe plundered the city of Ziklag while David was away, they were a big help in recovering everything. Later they became important officers in David's army. Almost every day new men joined David, until he had a large army.

David's Army

23. When David moved from Ziklag to Hebron to become king of Judah, a large number of men came to help him become king of all Israel.

24-29. Almost 7,000 experienced fighters were from Judah. More than 7,000 came from Simeon. Well over 4,000 came from the tribe of Levi. Zadok was a local commander who came with twenty-two other officers and their men just from his area alone. Only 3,000 came from Benjamin, because most people from the tribe were loyal to Saul, who was a Benjamite.

30-37. More than 20,000 came from Ephraim and 18,000 from West Manasseh. There were 200 top officers and their men from Issachar, 50,000 from Zebulun, and 1,000 officers and 37,000 men from Naphtali. More than 28,000 came from Dan, and 40,000 from Asher. And 120,000 came from Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh on the other side of Jordan.

38-39. All these men came to Hebron to make David king over the whole country, which they did. Then they celebrated for three days enjoying the company of their fellow countrymen.

40. People who lived nearby came from everywhere with donkeys, camels, mules, and oxen loaded with food. There were huge amounts of flour for bread, figs, raisins, grape juice, olive oil, and meat from cattle and sheep. The joy of the people over their new king was felt throughout the country.

David's Plan for the Ark

13 After David became king of all Israel, he talked with his officers and other leaders about bringing the ark to Jerusalem.

24. He also said to the people, "If you agree, and if it's God's will, let's ask the

priests and Levites and anyone else who can join us. We'll go and get the ark. It's only seven miles from here. It's been there for years. Let's bring it to Jerusalem." The people agreed.

5-6. So David invited people from all over the country to come and take part in bringing the ark of God to Jerusalem.

7. The Levites took the ark and set it on a new cart as the Philistines had done when they sent it back to Israel after capturing it. The Levites asked Abinadab's sons to help them. Uzzah was to stay with the cart, and Ahio was to lead the oxen.

8. David and the people were so happy. They jumped for joy before the Lord and sang songs of praise accompanied by harps, cymbals, and trumpets.

9-10. Now the ark was supposed to be carried on the shoulders of the Levites, not put on a cart. When they got partway to Jerusalem, the oxen stumbled. Uzzah grabbed the ark to steady it, and when he did, he collapsed and died. Only the priests were supposed to touch the ark, and Uzzah knew that. But he was living in open sin, and that's why he died.

11-12. David was shocked, and wondered why God would do this and spoil the celebration. He was afraid to move the ark one more step. So he said to the people, "I don't think we should take the ark to Jerusalem, because I'm afraid of it."

13-14. Then the Levites carefully moved it to a nearby house owned by a man named Obed. He was a Levite and agreed to take it in. The ark stayed there for three months before David got up enough courage to try moving it again. During this time the Lord blessed Obed and his family in all they did.

David Builds a Palace

14 The king of the coastal city of Tyre sent messengers to David congratulating him on becoming king. He also offered to provide David with building materials and workers to help him build his palace. The king could see how the Lord was blessing Israel for the sake of His people.

3-7. After David had moved to Jerusalem, he followed the bad custom of other neighboring kings and took many wives. So he had many sons and daughters. The names of some of the sons were: Shammua, Solomon, Nathan, and Elishama.

David Defeats the Philistines

8. When the Philistines heard that David had taken Saul's place as king, they decided to attack Israel and try to kill him. David heard that they were coming and decided to go and stop them.

9-10. When the Philistines began plundering Israelite villages in the valley, David prayed, "Lord, should I go against them now? Will You go with me?" The Lord said, "Go, and I'll help you."

11-12. So David attacked the Philistines and defeated them. After the battle, David said, "The Lord was the One who defeated our enemies." The Philistines retreated so fast that they left their idols lying in the field. When David saw this, he told his men to pick them up and burn them.

13-14. It wasn't long before the Philistines came back and started plundering the villages again. David prayed and asked the Lord what to do. The Lord said, "This time don't meet them head-on, but circle around and attack from the side where the mulberry trees are."

15-16. "When you get there, wait until

you hear the sound of marching in the treetops. This means that I'm going ahead of you, so follow Me and attack." That's what David did, and he defeated the Philistines all along that whole area.

17. After this David's fame spread to all the neighboring nations, and the Lord made them afraid of David.

The Ark Comes to Jerusalem

15 After David defeated the Philistines he began expanding Jerusalem, also called the City of David. He prepared a place for the ark and a special tent to protect it.

2-4. After three months he again decided to try to bring the ark to Jerusalem. He told the people that this time it would not be put on a new cart, but that the Levites would carry it on their shoulders as they were supposed to. Again he invited the priests and Levites and everyone else to come.

5-11. More than 800 descendants of Levi came. These were through his three sons, Kohath, Merari, and Gershon, and through Kohath's three sons, Elizaphan, Hebron, and Uzziel. Then David called in Zadok and Abiathar, the two high priests, and some of the other priests and Levites to talk to them.

12-15. He said, "All of you are leaders. I want you to consecrate yourselves to the Lord and get ready to bring the ark to Jerusalem. This time you must carry the ark on your shoulders as the Lord wants you to, and not put it on a cart. You are to see that everything is done right."

16-22. David also told the Levites to make arrangements for singers and musicians with harps and cymbals to come to sing praises to the Lord. So that's what the Levites did. They

arranged the singers and musicians in groups, each with its own leader.

23-24. Four Levites were chosen to guard the ark, and seven priests were asked to walk ahead of the ark and blow the trumpets.

25-26. Then David and his officers went to Obed's house to get the ark to bring it to Jerusalem. Everyone was so happy. The Lord blessed the Levites for carrying the ark. They sacrificed seven young bulls and seven sheep to the Lord in thanksgiving.

27-28. David wore no royal clothes, but only a plain white garment like the priests wore, and over that a plain robe like the Levites and musicians wore. So the people brought the ark to Jerusalem with trumpets, singing, and shouts of joy.

29. As they came into the city, David's wife Michal looked out the window and saw him jumping for joy before the Lord with the rest of the people. She was very embarrassed that the king of Israel would do that, and when he came home she gave him a real scolding.

The Ark Put in Place

16 David had the Levites bring the ark to the tent he had prepared for it. Then the priests offered sacrifices to the Lord, and David blessed the people. He gave everyone a loaf of bread, and dates and raisins.

4-6. Then David appointed Levites to lead out in worship, to pray for the people, and to praise the Lord for what He had done for Israel. Asaph was in charge, and Zechariah was his assistant. Other Levites played the harps and cymbals, and two priests blew the trumpets.

David's Song of Praise

7-9. David also wrote a hymn of

thanksgiving for the occasion. "Give thanks to the Lord. Call on His name. Tell the nations about His greatness and what He has done for us. Sing praises to the Lord for all His great and wonderful acts.

10-13. "Let those who love the Lord rejoice. Seek the Lord and look to Him. Remember what He has done for us. Remember His miracles and good judgments on our behalf. We are His people; the descendants of Jacob are His chosen ones.

14-18. "He is the Lord. His commandments are for all people. He will keep His promise forever. He first made His covenant with Abraham and then with Isaac and Jacob. He said, 'I will give you the land of Canaan as an inheritance.'

19-22. "Our ancestors were few and were pilgrims in the land. They moved from place to place, pitching their tents. The Lord watched over them, and no one did them harm. He told the kings not to touch them.

23-27. "Sing to the Lord! Proclaim His message of salvation! Tell of His marvelous deeds among the people. Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. He is above all idols. He made the heavens and the earth. Glory and majesty surround Him. Power and rejoicing fill His Temple.

28-30. "Praise the Lord! Praise His glory and strength! Give the Lord the glory due His name. Bring an offering and come before Him to worship in the beauty of holiness. He made the earth and put it firmly in place. No one can move it.

31-33. "Let the heavens rejoice. Let the earth be glad. Tell the world that the Lord is king! Let the oceans praise the Lord! Let the fields rejoice! Let the trees sing, for the Lord will come and put an end to sin.

34-36. "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love never ends. Call out to Him to save us, to deliver us from our enemies. We will be grateful and rejoice in praise. Praise to the Lord, the God of Israel. Praise Him now and forever." The people loved this hymn, and they all said, "Amen! Praise the Lord!"

The Worship Service

37-40. Then David left Asaph in charge of the worship services. Other Levites were asked to assist him, and some were asked to serve as guards. Zadok, the high priest, and his fellow priests were in charge of the sanctuary tent made by Moses, which was kept at Gibeon. Every morning and evening they offered sacrifices as the Lord had said.

41-42. Two other Levites were responsible to provide singers and musicians to sing praises to the Lord, to play the harps and cymbals, and to blow the trumpets. The sons of the two Levites were in charge of the gates.

43. The people went home rejoicing, and David went home and blessed his family.

God's Promise to David

17 After David had moved into his palace, he called for Nathan the prophet and said, "Here I am living in a palace, while the ark of God is in a tent. I want to build a temple for Him." Nathan said, "That's a good idea. Go ahead. The Lord will be with you."

3-6. That night the Lord said to Nathan, "In the morning, go back to David and give him this message: This is what the Lord says: 'You are not to build a temple for Me. I have lived in a tent ever since I brought your ancestors out of Egypt. I moved from place to place with them and

never asked their leaders to build a house for Me.'

7-8. "Also tell David, 'I took you as a shepherd boy and made you king of Israel. I have been with you wherever you went and have defeated your enemies for you. And I will give you a name among the great men of the earth.'

9-10. "'I will make a place for My people among other nations where they can settle and not be afraid. From the time of the judges until now they have been mistreated, but I will put a stop to it. And the royal line of your descendants will last forever.

11-14. "'When you die and sleep with your ancestors, one of your sons will be the next king. He will build a house for Me. I will be a Father to him and he will be a son to Me. I will not take away My support from him as I did from Saul. I will put him in charge of My people, and his royal house will never end.'"

15-16. So the next morning Nathan went to David and told him everything the Lord had said. Then David went to the tent where the ark was and prayed, "Lord, who am I, and who is my family that You made us so special to You?"

17. "As if that were not enough, now You say You will build through my son a line of kings that will never end. You're treating me as if I were someone important.

18-19. "What can I say? You know me better than I know myself. Yet You have honored me and set me over Your people. You have done this out of pure kindness and shown me the future greatness of my descendants. I don't deserve all this.

20-22. "Lord, there is no one like You. And there is no other God. What nation is like Israel that has been res-

cued from slavery and made special to the God of heaven? What other god has performed such great miracles to make room in this land for those he loves? You have made Israel Your own and promised to be their God forever.

23-24. "Now, O Lord, let the promise You have made to me and my family be carried out according to Your will. May Your name be honored forever. May people everywhere say, 'The mighty God of heaven and earth is the God of Israel.' Under Your rule the royal house of David will stand forever. **25-27.** "Lord, I have courage to pray this way because of Your promise. There's no doubt that You are God. You made this promise. Now, Lord, bless my family. Help them to be obedient so You can bless them as You want to. And what You bless will be blessed forever."

David's Victories

18 Sometime later David again fought off the Philistines and defeated them. He took the city of Gath and made it part of Israel. He defeated the attacking Moabites and made them subject to him.

3-4. He also fought against the king of Syria, who tried to extend his territory into Israel. David defeated the Syrians and took 1,000 chariots, 7,000 horsemen, and 20,000 foot soldiers. He kept 100 chariot horses for himself, and the rest were used for farm work.

5-6. Then the Syrians from Damascus sent another army against David, but he defeated them also and killed thousands of their men. He also stationed troops in the cities of Zobah and Damascus, and the people agreed to pay taxes to him. The Lord gave David victory wherever he went.

7-8. David took the gold shields from the Syrian officers and brought them

back to Jerusalem. He captured other Syrian cities and brought back huge quantities of bronze, which Solomon later used for the Temple.

9-11. When Toi, the king of Hamath, heard that David had defeated the Syrians, he sent his son with a delegation to congratulate David. The king of Syria had been making war on him, too. David accepted the king's gifts of silver and gold, and, together with the silver and gold he had taken from enemy nations, he dedicated it all to the Lord.

12-14. Now Abishai, the brother of Joab, defeated the attacking Edomites and killed thousands of their men. Then David placed troops in Edom, and the people agreed to pay taxes to him. The Lord gave David's army victory wherever they went. And David was just and fair to everyone in Israel and in the territories he occupied.

15-17. Joab was in charge of the entire army. Jehoshaphat was in charge of the nation's records. Zadok and Abiathar served as high priests. Shavsha was David's personal secretary. Benaiah was in charge of the royal bodyguards. And David's sons were given various duties in the government.

David's Other Victories

19 When the king of the Ammonites died, his son Hanun took over. David said to himself, "The old king was kind to my parents when they fled from Saul. I will be kind to his son." So David sent a delegation to the new king to express his sympathy.

3. When the delegation arrived, the nation's leaders said to the king, "Do you think that David is just expressing sympathy? This delegation is here

to spy out the land so they'll know how to take our country."

4-5. Hanun believed them and had David's men arrested. He had their beards shaved off on one side of their face and the backs of their robes cut off above their hips to shame them. Then he sent them away. When David heard about it, he sent word to his men to stay in Jericho until their beards had grown back before returning to Jerusalem.

6-7. Hanun knew this would anger David and bring on war, which he and his leaders wanted. So he paid tons of silver to hire a Syrian army with thousands of chariots to help him. Then the Ammonites got their own army ready and moved out for battle.

8-9. When David heard this, he ordered Joab to take the army out to meet them. The Ammonites stationed their troops by the gates of Rabbah, their capital, while the Syrian army drew battle lines in the open fields where they could use their chariots.

10-11. Joab saw that he could be attacked from two sides. So he took his best troops to fight the Syrians and told his brother Abishai to take the rest and fight the Ammonites.

12-13. He said to Abishai, "If the Syrians are too much for me, send some troops to help me. If the Ammonites are too much for you, I'll send some troops to help you. This way we can first defeat one army, then the other. Let's fight bravely for our people and our God. The Lord's will be done."

14-15. Then Joab attacked the Syrian forces and defeated them. When the Ammonites saw that, they turned and ran back into the city. So Joab and Abishai ordered their men to stop fighting and return to Jerusalem.

16. After the Syrians had been defeated, they sent word that they

needed reinforcements. So the king sent an additional army under Shobach to help them.

17-18. When David heard that, he called up all his extra men and took over. He attacked the combined forces of the Syrians and their allies and defeated them. He killed thousands of chariot drivers and foot soldiers as well as Shobach, their commander.

19. When the local kings realized that their forces had been defeated, they made peace with David and chose to be subject to Israel instead of to Syria. After that the Syrians never again helped the Ammonites fight against David.

David Captures Rabbah

20 The next spring, Joab took his men back to fight the Ammonites to finally take the city and overthrow the king.

2. Then David came from Jerusalem to march the troops into the city. He took the crown off the head of their god and put it on his own head. It was very heavy and was made of solid gold with many precious stones in it. David took many other things from the city.

3. Then he made the people work for Israel, using saws and axes to help rebuild and do other work.

Philistine Giants

4-5. Later a war with the Philistines broke out. During one of the battles a warrior from The Mighty Thirty killed one of the Philistine giants who had challenged Israel. Again the Philistines were defeated. In another battle, one of David's mighty warriors killed the younger brother of Goliath, who carried a huge spear.

6-8. In still another battle, a giant with six fingers on each hand and six toes

on each foot challenged Israel. David's nephew Jonathan killed him. These giants were descendants of Rapha, the giant of Gath. All three were killed by David's men.

The Counting of Israel

21 Now Satan wanted to bring trouble on Israel. So he played on David's pride and tempted him to count how many men of military age that he had.

2-3. One day David called in Joab and his officers and asked them to go through the country and count the men of military age. He wanted to know how large an army he really could have. Joab replied, "With the Lord on our side we know we have an army that can't be defeated. Numbering them shows a lack of faith. It's a sin to do this."

4-5. But David insisted. So Joab and his men went throughout the country counting all men of military age. It took almost ten months. When Joab came back, he told David there were more than a million men who could be called up for war, including David's standing army. Nearly a half million such men were from Judah alone.

6. Joab did not count the men from the tribe of Levi, because they were set aside to work at the Temple. Nor did he include the men from the tribe of Benjamin, because they refused to be counted.

7-8. The Lord was not happy with what David had done, because Israel's enemies would now think David's confidence was in the number of men he had. So the Lord decided to discipline David. When David was told, he repented and said, "I have sinned because I gave in to pride."

9-13. The Lord sent the prophet Gad to David with this message: "I'll give you

three choices. Do you want three years of famine, three defeats, or three days of a great sickness across the land?" David answered, "Tell the Lord that I would rather fall into His hands than into the hands of my enemies, because I know that He is merciful."

14-15. So the Lord sent a great sickness on the country, and thousands of warriors filled with pride died. Then the angel was ready to strike more such men in Jerusalem. But the Lord said, "Stop! That's enough!" The angel was hovering over Mount Moriah when God stopped him.

16-17. The Lord let David see the angel with a drawn sword in his hand. Then David and his officials, who had been fasting, fell on their knees. David prayed, "Lord, I was the one who brought all this on our country. The people are like innocent sheep. Let this sickness fall on me; I'm the one who deserves it. But spare the rest of my men."

18-21. Then the Lord sent the prophet Gad back to David to tell him to go and build an altar on Mount Moriah. A man named Ornan lived there. When his young sons saw the angel hovering in the sky with a sword in his hand, they ran and hid. Just then David came. Ornan went to meet him and fell on his knees.

22-23. David said, "Are you willing to sell this property? I would like to buy it and build an altar for the Lord to hopefully stop this sickness. I'll pay you whatever you ask." Ornan said, "I'll give it to you. And you may take my oxen for a sacrifice, and the boards here for wood to build a fire."

24-25. David said, "No, I want to pay the full price. I'm not giving the Lord something that doesn't cost me anything." So David gave Ornan 600 gold coins for the property, the oxen, and the wood.

26-27. Then David built an altar and had the priests prepare burnt offerings. When things were ready he prayed, and suddenly, fire came down from heaven and burned up the sacrifices. Then the Lord told the angel to put away his sword.

28. When David saw that the Lord had answered his prayer, he asked the priests to offer sacrifices of thanksgiving on the same altar.

29-30. Now the sanctuary with its altar that Moses had built was in the city of Gibeon. But David hadn't gone there. He was afraid to go anywhere because of his sin. But he did go to Mount Moriah to build an altar and pray, because the Lord had told him to do that.

David's Plans for a Temple

22 After David offered sacrifices on Mount Moriah, he looked around and said, "This is where the Temple of the Lord must be built, and where the ark should be."

2-4. So he called together all the foreigners living in Israel and offered them jobs working for the government. Many of them were skilled stonemasons, and others could work with metal and wood. David gave them all the supplies they needed, including cedar logs he had imported from Tyre and Sidon.

5. David said, "The Temple must not be an ordinary one, but magnificent and beautiful to attract the attention of people. Solomon is still young, so I'll lay out the plans and get things ready for him to build it."

6-8. Later, David called for Solomon and said, "My son, I want you to build the Temple according to the plan the Lord showed me. I wanted to build it, but the Lord doesn't want me to. Through Nathan the prophet He said to me, 'You have fought too many

wars. I don't want people associating war with My Temple. I want them to think of peace.

9-10. "'Your son Solomon will be the next king, and the people will associate him with peace. So he will build My Temple. His name means peace, and I will bring peace to Israel. I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to Me. His royal line will last forever.'

11-13. "My son, the Lord has spoken. He will be with you and help you build this Temple just as He said. May He also give you wisdom when you become king and help you to keep His commandments. If you obey Him, then He can bless you. So take courage and don't be afraid.

14-16. "I have thousands of tons of gold and silver and huge amounts of bronze and iron ready for you. I also have supplies of wood and stone, but you'll need more. You have lots of skilled workmen right here in Israel—stonemasons, masons, carpenters, and metalworkers. And when you're ready to begin, the Lord will help you."

17-18. Then David asked all the leaders in Israel to be ready to help Solomon. He said, "Hasn't the Lord given us peace on all sides? Hasn't He helped us settle this land?"

19. "So serve the Lord with all your heart and soul. When my son Solomon becomes king and starts building the Temple, help him. When it's finished, take the ark from the tent and put it in the Temple where it belongs, as well as the other things that go there."

The Levites

23 When David was too old to rule, he made his son Solomon king of Israel. He called together all the leaders, priests, and Levites to organize them for future services at the Temple. There were

38,000 Levites above the age of thirty.

4-6. David said to them, "I want 24,000 of you to carry on the work of the Temple, 6,000 to serve as officers, 4,000 as gatekeepers, and 4,000 as musicians." Then he divided them into three groups according to their ancestry.

7-11. The first group was organized under the ancestry of Gershon, the first son of Levi. There were such names as Shimei, Joel, Haran, and their descendants.

12-20. The second group was organized under the ancestry of Kohath, the second son of Levi. Kohath's first son was Amram, who had been the father of Moses and Aaron. Aaron's descendants were the ones who had been set aside as priests. Moses' two sons were counted among the Levites.

21-23. The third group was organized under the ancestry of Merari, the third son of Levi. His son Eleazar had only daughters.

24-26. Each group was registered under the name of their ancestor. All Levite men twenty years old and up were given responsibilities at the Temple. David said, "The Lord God of Israel has given His people peace, and He has come to be with us in Jerusalem. So the Levites will no longer have to carry the ark from place to place as they did in the wilderness."

27-28. Based on David's instructions, all Levites more than twenty years old were assigned to help the priests. The priests themselves were in charge of the Temple and its services to make sure everything was done right.

29-31. They were in charge of the holy bread, the oil, and the incense. They were to begin and end each day with a morning and evening sacrifice and give thanks and praise to the Lord. They also were to thank and

praise the Lord when they offered sacrifices on the Sabbath and other festivals. And they were to take their turns as scheduled.

32. So the Levites carried out their duties under the direction of the priests who had descended from Aaron, even though they all belonged to the tribe of Levi.

The Priests

24 The priests, who were descendants of Aaron, were divided into groups and given their duties. Aaron had four sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. The two older ones died before their father and left no sons. So the descendants of Aaron's two younger sons served as priests.

3-6. David organized the priests into groups and asked the two high priests to help him. The descendants of Eleazar were divided into sixteen groups, and the descendants of his brother Ithamar into eight groups. This was done by drawing lots in the presence of the king, the two high priests, and the leaders of the tribe of Levi.

7-19. When they drew lots, they drew one name at a time until they had twenty-four names with a leader for each group. The names of some of these leaders were: Abijah, Jeshua, Huppah, Immer, and Gamul. These groups were to serve at the sanctuary as scheduled and to follow the rules given by Aaron.

Leaders of the Levites

20-31. The Levites also had leaders for each of their groups. The names of some of them were: Amariah, Michah, Zechariah, Kish, and Eder. They drew lots for their duties, just as the priests had done. And they too did it in the presence of the king, the two

high priests, and the leaders of the tribe of Levi.

The Musicians

25 Then David and the leaders separated some of the Levites into three musical groups. The first group was led by Asaph, who had four sons. They were special and were to sing as requested by the king.

3. The second group was led by Jeduthun, who had six sons. They were to sing songs of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, accompanied by harps.

4-6. The third group was led by Heman, who had fourteen sons and three daughters. Heman also had the gift of prophecy and served the king. All his sons were skilled musicians. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman served under the direction of the king.

7-8. Altogether there were 288 musicians. They were divided into twenty-four groups, each with a leader. No difference was made between teacher and student. And they served as scheduled by drawing lots.

9-31. They drew lots to schedule the twenty-four groups. Each group had twelve members, and some of the names of the leaders were: Joseph, Gedaliah, Zaccur, Bukkiah, Azareel, Hanani, and Ezer.

The Guards

26 Some of the Levites were chosen as gatekeepers. They were descendants of Kohath, the second son of Levi. Some of the men making up the guards were: Zechariah, Elam, Sacar, Obed, and Elihu. Such men and their sons were all highly qualified for the work of the Lord. Hosah had thirteen descendants, and they were all gatekeepers.

12-15. These guards were divided into groups according to families and rotated just like the other Levites were. Lots were drawn, and no difference was made between old and young. Shelemiah drew the lot for guarding the east gate and his son Zechariah for the north gate. Obed drew the lot for guarding the south gate and his son for guarding the storehouse.

16-19. Shuppim drew the lot for guarding the west gate and Hosah for guarding the upper road. Every day there were six guards at the east gate, four each at the north and south gates, two on the west, two at each of the storerooms, and four at the upper road. The guard duty was scheduled as drawn by lots.

Other Duties

20-25. Some Levites were put in charge of the offerings and others in charge of the treasury. These men were descendants of Gershon, the first son of Levi. Some were descendants of Amram, Moses, and his sons, down the line to Shelomith.

26-28. Not only did the people's offerings go into the treasury, but David and his officers gave things to the Lord they had taken in battle. Other things had been given by the prophet Samuel, Saul, and Abner his general, as well as by Joab, David's top commander.

29-30. Some Levites were given duties away from the sanctuary to serve as officers and judges. Hashabiah and members of his ancestral house were put in charge of all religious and civil affairs among the tribes west of the Jordan River.

31. Jeriah was in charge of assigning these men their duties. When checking the records, they found that some very qualified men were living on the

other side of the Jordan. They too were given responsibilities.

32. There were almost 3,000 such men and all very qualified. David put them in charge of all religious and civil affairs on the other side of Jordan where they lived. This covered the territory of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh.

Military and Civil Leaders

27 Here is a list of those who served as government officials and army officers. The army was divided into twelve divisions of 24,000 men. Each division served for one month out of the year.

2-7. Here are the names of the officers who served: The first month, Joshobeam; the second month, Dodai; the third month, Benaiah, one of The Mighty Thirty; and the fourth month, Asahel, the brother of Joab.

8-15. The rest of the officers were Ira, Helez, Sibbechai, Abiezer, Maharai, Benaiah, and Heldai.

Tribal Leaders

16-22. Here is a list of some of the men who were administrative officers in charge of tribes: Eliezer over Reuben; Elihu over Judah; Omri over Issachar; Hoshea over Ephraim; Joel over West Manasseh; Iddo over East Manasseh; and Azareel over Dan.

23-24. Now David did not count the young men under twenty to make up his army, because the Lord promised that he would have all the men he needed. But he did order Joab to count all the fighting men to see what size army he had. This really displeased the Lord. So the full count of the fighting men was never recorded.

Other Government Officials

25-31. Here are the names of some of

the officials in charge of David's properties: Azmaveth, the royal treasury; Jonathan, the storehouse; Ezri, the farmworkers; Shimei, the vineyards; Hanan, the olive groves; Shitrai and Shaphat, the herds; Obil, the camels; Jehdeiah, the donkeys; and Jaziz, the sheep and goats.

32-34. David's uncle Jonathan was his counselor. He was a man of great wisdom and insight. Jehiel was in charge of educating and training the king's sons. Ahithophel and Hushai were two other royal advisers. After Ahithophel died, Jehoida and Abiathar became David's advisers. And Joab was in charge of the army.

Plans to Build the Temple

28 Before David died, he called together his military officers, the administrators of the royal properties, those in charge of the palace, the tribal leaders, and all the mighty warriors. He said to them, "I had it in my heart to build a temple for the Lord. God even guided me as I drew the plans for it.

3-5. "But the Lord said to me, 'You are not the one to build the Temple, because you are known as a warrior.' Yet it was the Lord who chose me to be king and to bring peace to Israel. He has given me many sons and daughters and has chosen Solomon to be the next king.

6-7. "The Lord said to me, 'Your son Solomon will build the Temple. I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to Me. I will make his kingdom last forever, if he will keep My commandments and administer My laws.'

8. "So now I charge all of you to obey the Lord and do everything He has told us to do. Then He'll let you stay in this good land and pass it on to your children."

9-10. Next, David turned to Solomon and said, "My son, I charge you before God and these witnesses that you serve Him with all your heart and soul and mind. If you turn away from Him, He will not force you to come back. He wants you to build the Temple for Him. So take it seriously and put your whole heart into it."

11-13. Then David gave Solomon the plans for all sections of the Temple, which he had drawn up under the direction of the Holy Spirit. He also gave Solomon the plans for organizing the priests and Levites and their responsibilities.

14-18. David wrote down how much silver and gold to use for making the various items, such as the golden lampstand, the little tables, the utensils, and the service bowls. He also told Solomon how much gold to use for the altar of incense, the ark, and for the angels that belong on top of it.

19-20. Then he said, "I drew all these plans under the direction of the Lord. So when you're ready to build the Temple, you can go ahead with confidence. Don't get discouraged, no matter how long it takes. The Lord will help you just as He helped me draw these plans. He won't let you down. He'll be with you all the way."

21. "The priests and Levites already know what they have to do. The workmen with their different skills are ready to help you. And the leaders of Israel and the people are behind you to do whatever they can."

Offerings for the Temple

29 Then David said to the people, "God has chosen my son Solomon to be the next king. But he doesn't have much experience. The work he needs to do is overwhelming. So I've done every-

thing I could to help get things ready for him to build the Temple. I've drawn the plans, and collected gold, silver, bronze, wood, marble, and many other things needed for building.

3-5. "In addition, I'm personally giving gold and silver for the Temple, because I love God with all my heart. I'm giving him more than 100 tons of gold and more than 200 tons of silver. This is for decorating the walls and for materials that the workmen will need. Who else is willing to give for the Temple?"

6-8. Then the leaders of Israel, the military officers, the administrators of royal properties, all gave willingly to the Lord for the building of the Temple. The offerings came to almost 200 tons of gold, more than 300 tons of silver, 600 tons of bronze, and 3,700 tons of iron. Those who brought precious stones gave them to Jehiel who was in charge of the treasury.

9. When the people saw what the leaders had given, they rejoiced and willingly gave to the Lord what they could. When David saw all this, he was very happy.

David Praises God

10-12. Then David praised the Lord in prayer: "O Lord, You are our God. Praise be to You for what You have done for Your people. You are surrounded by glory and majesty. Everything in heaven and earth is Yours. No one has given to You what You have. You are the one who makes others great and gives them power and strength."

13-16. "We praise Your name and give thanks for what You have done for us. Who are we to think that we have given something to You? We've only given back what You have given to us. We're just pilgrims on this earth. Our

years are numbered. No one can escape the grave without You. We own nothing. All the offerings we've brought are really from You.

17. "Lord, I know that You look at people's hearts to see if they really love You. You're happy when You see honesty and good intentions there. Whatever I've given You I have done in all honesty because I love You. And Your people have shown their love for You by the offerings they have brought.

18-19. "O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, keep this spirit of love alive in the hearts of Your people and keep them loyal to You. And please put in the heart of my son Solomon a strong desire to please You and to keep Your commandments. Help him do everything he can to build a beautiful temple for You."

20. After his prayer, David said to the people, "Come, praise the Lord our God with me." So they all praised the Lord. Then they fell on their knees and worshiped the Lord and honored David their king.

Solomon Becomes King

21-22. The next day, the people brought their animals to the priests for sacrifice. They brought 1,000 young

bulls, 1,000 male sheep, 1,000 lambs, and grape and bread offerings in abundance. They held a sacred feast to the Lord, for they knew He was with them. Then they proclaimed Solomon king and anointed him a second time.

23-24. So Solomon became king of Israel in place of his father David. He was a very successful king, and all the people obeyed him. All the military officers and the mighty men pledged their loyalty to him, as did the other sons of David. The Lord blessed Solomon, and the people stood in awe of him. No other king in Israel ever received such honor as he did.

David's Reign Ends

25-28. God had chosen David to be king. He ruled Israel for forty years—seven years from the city of Hebron and thirty-three years from Jerusalem. He died at a good old age, a rich king and well respected. His son Solomon became king.

29-30. The history of David from beginning to end is written in the books of the prophets Samuel, Nathan, and Gad. The records tell how he became king, how he ruled, and how powerful he was. They also tell all the things that happened to him, to Israel, and to the neighboring nations during his time.

2 Chronicles

INTRODUCTION: *This book continues the story of the families of Israel and Judah. It covers more than 250 years, from the building of the Temple by Solomon to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The people disobeyed God and were taken captive into other lands. We learn that God does not stop loving His people even though He has to discipline them. There were good kings and bad kings. The last king was Zedekiah. He refused to listen to God. The book ends with Jerusalem being destroyed by the king of Babylon.*

Solomon Asks for Wisdom

1 Solomon was a very powerful king because the Lord was with him. After he became king he asked his military officers, judges, and tribal leaders to go with him to Gibeon to worship the Lord. That's where the sanctuary tent was. The ark was in Jerusalem. Solomon ordered 1,000 sacrifices to be made as a sign of his consecration.

7-10. That night the Lord said to Solomon, "I have accepted your consecration. What do you want Me to do for you?" Solomon answered, "Lord, You were very kind to my father, David, and have chosen me to be the next king. But there are so many people to govern. Please give me wisdom in governing Your people. How else can I be the kind of king I should be?"

11-13. The Lord replied, "Since you didn't ask for wealth, fame, the death of your enemies, or a long life for yourself, I will give you what you have asked for. In addition, I will also give you wealth and fame." Then Solomon decided to go back to Jerusalem, together with those who came with him.

Solomon's Power

14-15. Soon Solomon had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses. He stationed

them in Jerusalem and in various cities throughout the country. During his reign, silver and gold were as common as stones, and cedarwood as plentiful as fig trees.

16-17. He bought horses from Turkey and horses and chariots from Egypt, then sold them for profit to other countries. That's one of the ways he became so rich.

Building the Temple

2 Solomon also went ahead with plans to build a temple for the Lord and a palace for himself. He used 70,000 men to transport materials, 80,000 to cut stones, and 3,600 to supervise.

3-4. He sent this letter to the king of Tyre: "Would you sell me some cedar logs similar to those you sold my father, David? I'm in the process of building a temple, a place of worship where we can offer sacrifices to God every day, including Sabbaths.

5-6. "I want to build the greatest temple there, because our God is greater than any other god. Actually, no one can build a temple to hold the God of heaven and earth. So in one sense the Temple is only a place where we can worship and bring our offerings.

7-9. "Would you send me a man who

can work with gold and silver as well as with colored cloth? Also I need someone who can engrave. And I need more cedar and cypress wood from Lebanon. You have skilled woodsmen, and I can send some of my men to help them. I need the best lumber I can find for building the Temple.

10. "I'll pay you 125,000 bushels of wheat and the same amount in barley. I'll also pay you 115,000 gallons of grape juice and the same amount of olive oil."

11-12. The king of Tyre sent this letter back to Solomon: "It must be because your God loves His people that He has given them such a good king as you. Praise be to your God, the Creator of heaven and earth, for giving David such a wise son to build a temple for God and a palace for himself.

13-14. "I will send you the best craftsman there is. His name is Hiram. His mother is an Israelite, and his father is from here. He can work with silver and gold as well as with colored cloth. He can do your engraving, too, and design things for you. He'll be glad to show your craftsman what to do.

15-16. "So send me the wheat, barley, grape juice, and olive oil, and we'll get started. I'll have my men cut logs for you, bring them down the mountain, and float them down the coast to Joppa. Your men can take them from there to Jerusalem."

17-18. As soon as Solomon got the letter, he ordered a count of all foreign workers in the country. There were more than 150,000 of them in Israel. So he hired 70,000 to bring the lumber from the coast to Jerusalem and 80,000 to cut stone. Then he appointed more than 3,000 supervisors to make sure everything was done on time.

The Size of the Temple

3 Solomon began building the Temple on Mount Moriah, where his father had seen the angel with a sword in his hand. David had bought that property and had decided that was where the Temple should be.

2-3. Solomon began building the Temple on the second day of the second month in his fourth year as king. He build the sanctuary part of the Temple the same size as Moses' sanctuary in the wilderness. It was 110 feet long and thirty-six feet wide.

4-7. The entryway was just as wide and was covered with gold. The Holy Place and Most Holy Place were covered with cedar, overlaid with gold, and had designs of wreaths and palm trees. The Temple itself was decorated with precious stones, and the beams, walls, and doors were overlaid with gold with designs of angels.

8-9. The Most Holy Place was thirty-six-feet square overlaid with pure gold. The Holy Place and the entrance were also overlaid with gold. Even the nails were made of gold.

10-14. The two huge angels on top of the ark were overlaid with gold. Their stretched out wings measured thirty-six feet and touched the walls on both sides of the room. In addition to doors, Solomon also had a beautifully colored curtain with designs of angels made for the Most Holy Place and hung it from chains of gold.

15-17. On either side of the steps going up to the sanctuary were two pillars. Each one was more than thirty feet high with a large crown on top decorated with carvings of wreaths and fruit. Solomon called the one on the right Jachin, meaning God Builds, and the one on the left Boaz, meaning God Strengthens.

The Temple Furnishings

4 The altar of sacrifice in the large sanctuary courtyard was thirty-six feet square and eighteen-feet high with steps. There also was a huge basin in the courtyard. It was eighteen feet across, with many carvings on it. It sat on the back of twelve bronze bulls, three each facing north, south, east, and west.

5-6. The basin was shaped like the cup of an open lily and could hold 1,700 gallons of water. There also were smaller basins placed throughout the courtyard for the priests to wash their hands and feet.

7-8. Solomon had a huge seven-branched lampstand made for the Holy Place, as well as ten little ones. He had a large golden table made to hold the sacred bread and ten little ones. Then he had the altar of incense made, and one hundred golden bowls for additional incense.

9-10. The inner sanctuary courtyard was for the priests, and the courtyard outside for the people. All the doors for the courtyards were overlaid with bronze. The large basin was in the inner courtyard placed in line with the sanctuary.

11-16. Solomon also had pots, bowls, forks, and shovels made for use in the courtyard with the sacrifices. Under his direction, Hiram made the two tall pillars with their crowns and wreaths, the huge basin resting on the backs of bronze bulls, and all the other items needed for the sanctuary.

17-18. All this work was done at metal workshops in the Jordan Valley. There were so many things made out of bronze that no one bothered to keep track of how much bronze was used.

19-22. All containers in the Temple were gold, including the altar of incense, the tables holding the sacred bread, and the lampstands. The

lamps, the decorations, the bowls for incense, even the doors going into the Holy and Most Holy Place, were overlaid with pure gold.

The Ark Brought to the Temple

5 When the Temple was finished, Solomon placed everything David had dedicated to the Lord in the Temple storehouse. This included all the silver and gold and other precious materials left over from building.

2-6. Then he called all the tribal leaders together to take part in moving the ark from the southern part of Jerusalem to Mount Moriah in the north. When they came, the priests picked up the ark and carried it on their shoulders to the Temple.

7-10. The priests set the ark with its two little angels underneath the wings of the two huge angels that Solomon had put there. The priests left the carrying poles there too, and that's where they stayed. Inside the ark were the stone tablets on which the Lord had written the Ten Commandments.

11-12. Then the priests left the sanctuary, and the Levite musicians came into the courtyard dressed in white robes ready to play and sing. They played their harps and cymbals, and the priests blew their trumpets in celebration.

13-14. With one voice they gave praise and thanksgiving to God and sang, "The Lord is good. His love endures forever." Then the cloud of the Lord's presence filled the Temple with such glory that the priests and Levites had to stop the service and leave the courtyard for a while.

Solomon's Response

6 Solomon prayed, "O Lord, though Your presence is in this cloud, I have built this great Temple for You to live in forever."

3-6. Then he said to the people, "Praise the Lord! He has kept His promise to my father, David. He said to him, 'From the time I brought My people out of Egypt until now, I have not chosen any city as My own, nor did I pick anyone to rule My people. But now I have chosen David to be king and Jerusalem as the place to build My Temple.'

7-9. "That's why my father, David, had set his heart on building a temple. The Lord said to him, 'You did well to want to build a temple for Me. But you are not the one to do it. Your son Solomon will build it for Me.'

10-11. "The Lord has kept His promise as He always does. I became the next king and have built this Temple for Him. I also have brought here the ark with the commandments, which are the basis of God's covenant with His people."

Solomon's Prayer

12-14. Then Solomon went to the platform he had built that was about five-feet high, knelt down, raised his hands to heaven, and prayed, "O Lord God, there is no other one like You. You keep Your promises and Your covenant of love with all those who walk in Your ways.

15-17. "You kept Your promise to my father, David, as we can see today. You said to him, 'You will always have a descendant on the throne of Israel as long as they listen to Me and do their best to walk in My ways as you have done.' May this promise come true, too, just as Your promise about me and this Temple did.

18. "But how can You, Lord, the God of heaven, live on earth with sinful people? Even the universe can hardly hold Your glory. How can this Temple hold it?

19. "Lord, please listen to my prayer.

I plead for Your mercy and kindness. I am Your servant. I'm praying this prayer in front of all these people.

20-21. "Do keep an eye on this Temple day and night so no harm will come to it. You said this is where we are to worship You. Listen to my prayers when I pray facing the Temple. And hear the prayers of Your people when they pray facing this way. Listen from Your place in heaven, and when we confess our sins, forgive us.

22-23. "When a man hurts a neighbor and is brought here to this Temple and takes an oath that he's innocent, You judge, Lord. Punish those who are guilty and stand behind those who are innocent.

24-25. "When Your people are defeated by their enemies because of their sins, but they look to this Temple and ask for forgiveness, please hear their prayers and forgive them and bring them safely back home.

26-27. "When there is no rain because the people have sinned and they look to this Temple and ask for help, please listen to them. Forgive them and send them the rain they need.

28-31. "If sickness comes, or if grasshoppers destroy our crops, or disaster strikes, when the people look to this Temple and to You for a solution, please help them. You're the only one who knows their hearts. Forgive them and help each one according to their individual needs so they will respect You and walk in Your ways.

32-33. "When a foreigner comes here from a distant land because he has heard about You and looks to this Temple and prays, please listen to him. This way other people will hear about it and love and respect You as we do.

34-35. "When our people go to war and look to this Temple and ask for

help, please listen to their prayers. Give them the help they need to defeat their enemies.

36-40. "When Your people sin and You let their enemies take them as captives to other lands, and they look toward this Temple, please hear their prayers. When they confess their sins, do forgive them. When they're willing to obey You, be merciful to them and help them. May Your eyes and ears be open to their prayers.

41. "Now, Lord, make this Temple Your own. Come and let Your glory appear between the angels on the ark and never leave us. Bless Your priests and help them as they teach the people. Bless Your people so they'll be happy and rejoice in Your goodness.

42. "Lord, don't reject this king that You have chosen. Be kind to him. Remember the promise You made to my father, David."

The Temple Dedicated

7 When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices. The glory of the Lord filled the whole Temple. The light was so bright that the priests could not continue the service. When the people saw the fire, they fell on their knees, bowed to the ground, and praised the Lord for His goodness and love.

4-5. Then Solomon and the people brought their personal sacrifices to the Lord. The king brought thousands of young bulls and sheep. Most of these sacrifices were peace offerings that the priests and people could eat. Their hearts overflowed with thanksgiving as they dedicated the Temple.

6-7. The priests and the Levites took their places. They praised the Lord in song, the priests blew trumpets, and the people stood to honor the Lord.

Then Solomon dedicated the sanctuary itself, and the priests offered peace offerings on the altar in front of the Holy Place. There were so many offerings the altar couldn't hold them all.

8-10. The king and the people also kept the Festival of Shelters for seven days. They came from everywhere, some from as far away as Egypt. On the last day of the festival, the king blessed the people and sent them home. Their hearts were full of joy over everything the Lord had done for their king and themselves.

11. So Solomon finished the Temple and did all he had in mind to do. Then he began to build his palace.

God Appears to Solomon

12-14. The Lord appeared to Solomon that night and said, "I have heard your prayer and accept this Temple as My own. If I hold back the rain, or let the grasshoppers eat the crops, or let sickness come, it will be to discipline My people. But if they humble themselves and pray and turn from their wickedness, I will forgive them and heal the land.

15-16. "My eyes will be on this Temple, and My ears will be open to the prayers of My people. This Temple is now Mine. I will watch over it and put My heart here.

17-18. "As for you, if you serve Me faithfully as your father David did and keep My laws, I will fulfill the promises I made to your father. I told him that there would always be a descendant of his on the throne of Israel.

19-20. "But if you and your people turn away from Me and don't keep My commandments, but worship idols, then I'll have to take you out of this land. I will also have to turn away from My Temple, and it will be hated by other nations and destroyed.

21-22. "Even though other nations admire the Temple now, they will be shocked at what will happen to it. They will say, 'Why did the God of Israel do this to His own Temple?' Others will say, 'He did it because His people turned away from Him and went after other gods.'"

Solomon's Other Projects

8 It took Solomon seven years to build the Temple and thirteen years to build his palace. He also rebuilt the cities that the king of Tyre had returned to Israel.

3-6. Solomon took back one area from the king of Syria, fortified cities, and put troops and supplies there. He built whatever he wanted to in Jerusalem and throughout the country.

7-10. The original people who were still in the land paid taxes by working as laborers. But the Israelites served as soldiers, officers, and supervisors for the king.

11. Then Solomon brought his wife, who was the king of Egypt's daughter, from the lower section of Jerusalem to the palace. He didn't want her to live near the Temple.

12-13. Every day Solomon offered sacrifices to the Lord. In addition he brought special offerings to the Lord on the Sabbath and on festivals such as the Passover.

14-16. He carried out all the instructions his father David had given him. The priests offered the sacrifices, and the Levites helped them and provided the music. Solomon also appointed Temple guards and organized them into units as David had told him to. The workmen did everything Solomon told them to do until the Temple was finished.

17-18. After the Temple was done, Solomon began to build ships, and

the king of Tyre sent some of his experienced sailors to help him. Together they sailed to other countries and brought back tons of gold.

The Queen of Sheba

9 When the queen of Sheba heard about Solomon's wisdom and all that he had done, she decided to go and see for herself. She arrived in Jerusalem with a large number of servants and camels carrying spices, precious stones, and gold. Then she asked Solomon all the questions she could think of, and he answered them all.

3-4. So the queen of Sheba heard for herself how wise Solomon was and saw all the things he had done. She was amazed at how he had organized his staff, the good food they ate, and the expensive clothes they wore. And she was surprised at the many sacrifices Solomon offered to God.

5-6. She said to Solomon, "The report I heard about you in my country is true. But I didn't believe it until I came and heard and saw everything for myself. In fact, they didn't tell me half of it."

7-9. "How fortunate your officials are to be around you! Praise be to the God of Israel for what He has done for you! There's no doubt that He loves you and made you king. He must really love His people to let them be ruled by such a wise king." The queen gave Solomon gifts of thousands of pounds of gold, and many jewels and spices.

10-11. Now Solomon's sailors, with the help of the men from Tyre, had brought back from other countries huge amounts of gold, precious stones, and juniper wood. Solomon used this wood to make the steps for the Temple and the palace, as well as to make harps. Nothing like this had ever been seen in Israel before.

12. As the queen of Sheba was leaving, Solomon gave her everything else she asked for. What he gave her was more than she had given him. Then she returned to her own country.

Solomon's Wealth

13-14. Every year Solomon received tons of gold and huge amounts of silver as gifts from kings and governors who came to visit him. This was in addition to the taxes that the people and merchants paid.

15-19. Then Solomon had 200 large shields and 300 smaller ones made out of gold and hung them in the reception hall of the palace. He had a large ivory throne overlaid with gold with two huge lions on either side and six steps going up to it. And on each end of each step was a smaller lion. No other king ever had anything like this.

20-21. All of Solomon's cups and dishes were made out of gold, as was the furniture in the great reception hall. Nothing was made out of silver, because in those days silver wasn't worth much. Solomon also had a large fleet of ships that went to other countries and brought back gold, silver, ivory, monkeys, and peacocks.

22-24. Solomon was richer and wiser than any other king. People came from everywhere to listen to the wisdom that God had given him. Year after year they came and brought him gifts of gold, silver, spices, expensive robes, horses, and even weapons.

25-28. He had thousands of chariots, and men trained for battle who were stationed in Jerusalem and in various cities throughout the country. Solomon traded in horses, and ruled from the Euphrates River in the north to the Philistine country in the west and to Egypt in the south. Silver had little

value, and cedarwood was as plentiful as fig trees.

The Death of Solomon

29-31. The things that Solomon did are also recorded in the books of Nathan the prophet, the prophecies of Ahijah, and in the visions of Iddo the prophet. Solomon ruled for forty years. When he died, he was buried next to his father, David, in the city of Jerusalem. And his son Rehoboam took over.

The Country Divides

10 Rehoboam went to Shechem where all the leaders had come to crown him king. When Jeroboam, who had fled to Egypt to escape from Solomon, heard about this, he came back home. So the leaders asked him to join them to go to see Rehoboam about their high taxes.

4-5. They said to Rehoboam, "Your father had us pay very high taxes. If you lower our taxes, we'll be happy to have you as our king." Rehoboam replied, "Come back the day after tomorrow, and I'll give you an answer."

6-7. Then Rehoboam called in his father's older advisers and asked them what to do. They said, "Listen to the people and be kind to them. Lower their taxes and they'll be happy to have you as their king."

8-11. But Rehoboam didn't like their advice. So he called in his young friends that he had gone to school with and asked them what to do. They said, "Tell the people that you will increase their taxes, and if they don't listen, you'll have them whipped."

12-14. Rehoboam liked that. So when Jeroboam and the other leaders came back to see him, he followed the advice of his young friends. He said to the leaders, "If you think my father's

taxes were too much for you, wait till you see what I will do. if you don't pay these taxes, I'll have you whipped."

15. The result was the opposite of what Rehoboam expected. The leaders rebelled. Years before, the prophet Ahijah had told Jeroboam that this would happen.

16-17. So when they saw how unreasonable Rehoboam was, they said, "Why should our taxes go to Jerusalem? Let Rehoboam take care of himself!" So they went home and formed their own country and left Judah and Benjamin to Rehoboam.

18. Rehoboam couldn't believe this. So he sent the man in charge of forced labor to make the people work off their taxes. The people refused and stoned the man to death. When Rehoboam realized how determined the people were, he jumped in his chariot and raced back to Jerusalem.

19. So now there were two countries, ten tribes to the north called Israel and two tribes to the south under the name of Judah.

Rehoboam Is King of Judah

11 Then Rehoboam called up thousands of troops to fight the other tribes and reunite the country. The Lord sent Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam with this message: "I don't want you to fight your brothers to the north. I let this happen for a reason." So the king and his men turned around and went back home.

5-12. Rehoboam decided to fortify such cities as Bethlehem, Gath, and Hebron to help defend Judah. He stationed troops in these cities with spears and shields to keep the country under his control.

13-15. Priests and Levites from across the country supported Rehoboam.

Those living in the northern kingdom left their properties and moved to Judah because King Jeroboam did not accept their ministry. He appointed his own priests and had them serve at the shrines he built for his golden calves and other idols.

16-17. The people who loved the Lord and wanted to worship Him followed the priests and Levites. Over the next three years the people kept moving to Judah where they could worship the Lord. So the southern kingdom got stronger, and the people were glad to have Rehoboam as their king, even with the high taxes.

Rehoboam's Final Years

18-21. Rehoboam had married his cousin Mahalath, and she gave him three sons. Then he married his cousin Maachah, and she gave him four sons. Rehoboam loved her more than any of his wives. Like other kings he had many wives. Altogether they gave him twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters.

22-23. Then Rehoboam appointed Abijah, the firstborn son of Maachah, to be the next king. He appointed his other sons as supervisors over districts and fortified cities throughout Judah and Benjamin. Since they were princes, they, too, had many wives.

Egypt Invades Judah

12 After Judah became strong, Rehoboam turned away from God. So the Lord let the king of Egypt invade Judah. He attacked with more than 1,000 chariots and thousands of horsemen and troops. Some of his men came from Libya, Ethiopia, and Sudan. They took many fortified cities and came right up to Jerusalem.

5-6. Then the Lord sent Shemaiah the prophet to Rehoboam and his officers

with this message: "You have turned away from Me, so I have turned away from you." When Rehoboam and his officers heard that, they humbled themselves and confessed their sins.

7-8. When the Lord saw that, He sent Shemaiah back to them with this message: "Because you have humbled yourselves and confessed your sins, I will deliver you from the king of Egypt. I will not let him destroy Jerusalem, but will let you become subject to him so you can see how much better it is to serve Me."

9. Then the king of Egypt attacked Judah and marched right into the city of Jerusalem. He took all the treasures in the Temple and the palace with him, including Solomon's golden shields.

10-11. So Rehoboam made shields of bronze to replace them. Whenever he went to the Temple, the guards would use these bronze shields to go with him and then put them back in the palace.

12. Because Rehoboam had humbled himself and confessed his sins, the Lord did not let the king of Egypt destroy Jerusalem. And it wasn't long before Judah recovered.

Rehoboam's Reign Ends

13-14. Rehoboam continued as king. He was forty-one years old when he began to rule, and he reigned for seventeen years. He did some wicked things, because he did not seek the Lord with all his heart.

15-16. Everything that Rehoboam did is recorded in the books of the prophets Shemaiah and Iddo who also kept the king's family records. All during the reign of Rehoboam there were periods of fighting between Israel and Judah. When Rehoboam died he was buried in Jerusalem, and his son Abijah took over.

Abijah's Reign

13 In the eighteenth year of Jeroboam, king of Israel, Abijah became king of Judah. He ruled for only three years. During this time there was constant fighting between him and Jeroboam. One time he went against Israel with thousands of men, but Jeroboam came against him with twice that many.

4-7. The armies faced each other in the mountains of Ephraim. Abijah called out to the men of Israel, "Listen to me! Don't you know that God promised David that his descendants would rule over us forever? So Israel belongs to Judah. You know that Jeroboam rebelled against Solomon and later with others against Rehoboam.

8-9. "And now you have come to attack the descendants of David and rebel even more against the Lord. You have a huge army and the golden calves you worship. You drove the priests and Levites out of the country and have chosen priests of your own. Anyone who brings a bull and seven male sheep can be a priest.

10-11. "But in Judah we worship the Lord, and our priests are descendants of Aaron. Every day they offer morning and evening sacrifices and burn incense to the Lord. They set out the sacred bread and make sure that the lampstand has enough oil for the night. We keep God's commandments, but you have turned your backs on Him.

12. "God is with us. He's our Captain. His priests are here with their trumpets ready to give the signal for battle. So, men of Israel, don't fight against the Lord, because you can't possibly win."

13-14. While Abijah was talking, Jeroboam sent some of his troops around behind him. Then Jeroboam

gave the order to attack. When the men of Judah saw that they were surrounded, they cried to the Lord for help, and the priests blew the trumpets to counterattack.

15-18. When the men of Judah gave the battle cry, the Lord came to their rescue and helped them defeat the Israelites. Jeroboam and his men turned and ran. But the men of Judah overtook them and killed or wounded thousands. They could do this only because the Lord was on their side.

19-20. Then Abijah took some of the cities, including Bethel, and made them part of Judah. Jeroboam never recovered his former military power, and soon afterward he died. But Abijah's kingdom grew stronger.

21-22. Over the years Abijah married a number of wives as all the kings did in those days. His wives gave him twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. Everything that Abijah did was recorded by the prophet Iddo.

Asa Becomes King

14 When Abijah died he was buried in the royal tombs in Jerusalem, and his son Asa became the next king. For the first ten years of his reign there was peace in Judah.

2-5. Asa did what was right and good. He destroyed the pagan altars and cut down the poles of the mother goddess. He told the people to worship the Lord and keep His commandments. He did this in every city, and the country was at peace.

6-7. He also fortified many border cities while there were no wars. The Lord gave His people rest from their enemies. Asa said, "Let's fortify these cities while we still have peace on all sides, which has come only from the Lord."

8. Asa had a huge army of trained and brave men. They were equipped with swords, shields, bows, and arrows.

9-10. Zerah the Ethiopian decided to attack Judah. He invaded the country with thousands of troops and hundreds of the best chariots. He got part way into Judah when Asa went out to meet him.

11. Then Asa called on the Lord to help him. He prayed, "Lord, there is no one like You to help us. Please go with us against this huge army. Don't let them defeat us, or they will think they defeated You."

12-14. The Lord answered Asa's prayer, and the men of Judah defeated the Ethiopians who turned and ran. Asa pursued them all the way to the border of Egypt. So many of them were killed or wounded that the king never attacked again. Asa and his men destroyed all the towns along the way and took large amounts of plunder.

15. He also attacked nearby camps of enemy herdsmen and took a large number of sheep and camels from them. Then Asa and his men returned to Jerusalem.

Asa's Reforms

15 As Asa and his men were returning from battle, the Lord sent the prophet Azariah out to meet them with this message: "Listen, O king, and all you men. The Lord is with you as long as you're with Him. But if you forsake Him, He will forsake you."

3-4. "For a long time the people didn't worship the Lord the way they should have, and no priest taught them differently. But when troubles came, they turned to the Lord with all their hearts, and He helped them."

5-7. "In earlier days it wasn't safe to travel, because there was danger, fight-

ing, and war everywhere. God let all this happen. But when we turned to Him for help, He gave us peace. So king, be strong and full of courage. Don't give up serving the Lord. The work you do for Him will be rewarded."

8. When Asa and his men heard this, they took courage. Asa took away all the pagan idols out of the country, repaired the altar of the Lord in the Temple, and offered sacrifices to Him. **9-10.** Then he invited the people to come and worship the Lord, including those from the nearby tribes of Israel. Many of these people moved to Judah, because they saw that Asa loved the Lord. This took place in the fifteenth year of Asa's reign.

11-13. They sacrificed hundreds of cattle and thousands of sheep from the plunder brought back from the war. They made a covenant with the Lord to serve Him with all their hearts. Those who stubbornly kept on worshiping their idols were arrested and condemned to death.

14-15. Then the people took an oath of loyalty to the Lord accompanied by the blowing of rams' horns and trumpets. They took pleasure in worshiping the Lord and did so eagerly. So God came close to them and gave them peace on all sides.

16-17. Asa also removed his grandmother from her position of influence, because she had set up a pole to the mother goddess in the middle of Jerusalem. He cut it down and burned it in the valley outside the city. He never got around to destroying the pagan shrines in the mountains. Yet he loved the Lord and served Him all his life.

18. Then Asa brought all the silver and gold that his fathers had dedicated to the Lord to the Temple to be kept there.

19. There had been no major war until Zerah, the Ethiopian, attacked Judah and was defeated.

Asa and the King of Syria

16 Later in Asa's reign, the new king of Israel decided to attack Judah. He took the border city of Ramah, made plans to fortify it, and kept the people from going to Jerusalem to worship.

2-3. So Asa took the silver and gold from the royal treasury and the Temple and sent it to the king of Syria with this message: "Let's work together as our ancestors did. Break your friendship treaty with Israel so they'll get worried and pull their troops out of my country to protect their borders."

4-5. The king of Syria agreed and ordered his troops to invade Israel. He took a few of the border cities where Israel kept their supplies. When the king of Israel heard this, he withdrew his men from Ramah and went back home.

6. Then Asa took his men to Ramah, and they took all the building materials that the king of Israel had stored there. Asa used them to fortify his own cities.

7-8. About this time, the prophet Hanani came to see Asa and said to him, "Because you depended on the king of Syria to help you instead of the Lord, you will not be able to defeat him when he comes against you. Didn't you defeat Zerah, the Ethiopian, with his huge army of horses and chariots? When you depended on the Lord, He helped you."

9. "The Lord keeps an eye on everything that goes on in the world. He helps those who love Him and are loyal. So you have been very foolish to do what you did. From now on there

will always be war against Judah."

10. This message really upset Asa. So he had the prophet arrested and put in prison. Then he became very mean and treated the people cruelly.

The Death of Asa

11-13. Everything that Asa did is also found in the books of Kings. In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa got sick. But he didn't ask the Lord for help, only the doctors. Two years later he died.

14. They buried him in Jerusalem in a tomb he had made for himself. They rubbed down his body with spices and oils and closed the tomb. Then they burned spices and oils in his honor at the entrance to the tomb.

The Next King of Judah

17 Asa's son, Jehoshaphat, became the next king of Judah. He strengthened his army to defend himself against Israel and stationed troops in all the fortified cities.

3-6. The Lord blessed Jehoshaphat because he looked to David and to his father Asa's earlier life as an example. He worshiped God and kept His laws and commandments. Under his rule the kingdom became strong again and he was highly respected. He destroyed all the places of pagan worship and the poles of the mother goddess.

7-9. In his third year as king he appointed five officials to see that the people were taught about God. They were assisted by nine priests and two Levites. These men took the book of God and went throughout the country teaching the people.

10-11. The Lord made other nations afraid to start a war with Judah. So the country had peace on all sides. The Philistines even brought gifts to Jehoshaphat, including large amounts

of silver. And the Arabians brought him thousands of sheep and goats.

12-13. Jehoshaphat became more and more powerful. He built fortifications and supply centers all over Judah and stationed the most experienced troops in Jerusalem.

14-19. There were three top commanders from Judah and two from Benjamin, with thousands of men under each of them. All these troops were well trained and equipped for war. They were stationed in and around Jerusalem, in addition to the men stationed throughout the country.

The Prophet Micaiah

18 When Jehoshaphat became wealthy and strong, he agreed for his son to marry Ahab and Jezebel's daughter from Israel.

2-3. Sometime later he went to visit Ahab, who honored him with a royal banquet. During the feast Ahab urged Jehoshaphat to join him against the king of Syria, who had taken one of Israel's cities. He said, "Will you go with me?" Jehoshaphat said, "Why not? We are one and the same people, so we should stick together."

4-5. Then he added, "Let's first ask the Lord what we should do." So Ahab called all the prophets of Baal together, more than 400 of them, and asked them what to do. They said, "Go against the king of Syria, and the Lord will give you the victory."

6-8. Jehoshaphat asked, "Isn't there a prophet of the Lord we can ask?" Ahab replied, "There is, but I don't like him. He never has anything good to say. His name is Micaiah." Jehoshaphat said, "Let's ask him anyway." So Ahab sent one of his officers to go and get him.

9-11. The two kings sat on portable thrones by the gate of Samaria, and the

400 prophets of Baal were all prophesying good things for them. Then Zedekiah, one of Baal's prophets, showed the two kings two iron horns and said to them, "You will be like these two iron horns when you attack the king of Syria. And you will defeat him."

12-13. In the meantime, the officer got to Micaiah's house and told him that the king wanted to see him. He also suggested that Micaiah tell the king the same thing that the prophets of Baal were telling him. Micaiah said, "As surely as the Lord lives, I will tell the king only what the Lord tells me."

14-15. When they got there, Ahab asked Micaiah whether he should go against the king of Syria or not. Micaiah said, "Go ahead! I'm sure you'll win. You want me to agree with your prophets, don't you?" Ahab said, "How many times have I told you not to play games with me? Tell me the truth."

16-17. Then Micaiah said, "I had a vision, and I saw the armies of Israel and Judah scattered like sheep across the hills without a shepherd. I asked the Lord what this meant. He said, 'These men have lost their leader in battle. Let them go back home.' " Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "See, I told you that he never has anything good to say."

18-19. Micaiah continued, "In vision I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the angels were standing in front of Him. He said to them, 'How can we get Ahab to attack the king of Syria? Besides, we need to put an end to Ahab's wicked reign.' One angel suggested one thing and another something else."

20-22. "Then I saw an evil angel appear and he said, 'I know what to do. I will make Ahab's prophets lie to him.' The Lord said, 'I will not stop you, because I have already decided to remove My protection from him.' So

these prophets are lying to you. You will be wounded in battle and die."

23-24. Then Zedekiah, one of Ahab's false prophets, slapped Micaiah in the face and said, "When did the Spirit of the Lord leave us to speak through you?" Micaiah replied, "You'll find out. When the Syrian army comes, you'll go and hide in the back room of your house to keep from being killed."

25-27. Then Ahab said to one of his officers, "Arrest Micaiah and put him in prison. Tell them to give him nothing but bread and water until I come back from the war with Syria." Micaiah said, "If you come back alive, then what I said was not from the Lord. Mark my word."

The Death of Ahab

28-29. Jehoshaphat decided to go with Ahab against the Syrians because he had promised to do so. When they got to the front, Ahab said, "I want to get involved in the fighting. So I'll disguise myself. But I want you to stay dressed as you are and direct the battle." Jehoshaphat agreed.

30-32. Now the king of Syria had told his officers to focus on capturing Ahab. When they saw Jehoshaphat, they thought he was Ahab and went after him. Jehoshaphat cried out to the Lord for help and the main fighting turned away from him. When the officers realized that it wasn't Ahab, they stopped chasing him.

33-34. But one of the Syrians shot an arrow at random. Ahab shouted to his chariot driver, "I'm wounded! Get me out of here!" The driver did. Then Ahab told him to turn around and go back. The rest of the day he stood in his chariot directing the battle. But as the sun went down, he died, and they took his body back to Samaria.

Jehoshaphat Listens

19 When the fighting ended, Jehoshaphat went back to Jerusalem. The prophet Jehu went out to meet him and asked, "Do you think it was right to help a wicked king like Ahab? You have set a very bad example, and the Lord is not happy about it."

3. "But He sees a lot of good in you. You got rid of the idols in the land and the poles of the mother goddess the people worshiped. And you have done your best to follow the Lord. But He will have to discipline you to let the people know that your relationship with Ahab was wrong."

4-7. Jehoshaphat confessed his sin and went around the country helping people get closer to God. He appointed judges and said to them, "You are working for the Lord. So stay close to Him and do your job right. He wants you to treat the people fairly. So don't let anyone bribe you to pervert justice. The Lord will not like it."

8-9. The king also set up a supreme court in Jerusalem and appointed judges from among the Levites, priests, and other leading men. He told them the same thing. He said, "You are working for the Lord. So be faithful in all you do and love the Lord."

10. "When the people come to you to settle their cases, remind them to stop sinning. If you don't do this, the Lord will not be pleased with you. But if you warn them, He will not hold you guilty for what they do."

11. "Amariah, the high priest, will have the final word in religious matters. Zebadiah, the governor, will have the final word in everyday matters. The Levites will serve as officers. It will be their responsibility to see that the decisions of the judges

are carried out. So all of you take up your duties with courage, and may the Lord bless you."

Judah Invaded

20 Not long afterward the Lord let the Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites invade Judah. A messenger brought the news to Jehoshaphat that his army had been attacked, and one city was taken.

3-5. When the king heard that, he was afraid and asked the Lord for help. He called for a day of fasting and prayer. All across the country people got together asking the Lord for protection. Many came together in the courtyard of the temple to pray.

6-8. Jehoshaphat was there and prayed, "O Lord, You are the God of heaven and earth. You rule over all the nations. All power is Yours, and no one can stand up against You. You are the one who gave us this land, as You promised Abraham. And we have built this Temple for You."

9-12. "You said that if troubles came we should pray to You and You would help us. Now the forces of three nations are coming against us. We were kind to their ancestors as You told us to be when we came out of Egypt. And this is how they're repaying us. O Lord, please help us. They have such a huge army. We don't know what to do."

13-15. As Jehoshaphat was praying, the Spirit of the Lord came on Jahaziel, who came up front and said, "Listen to the word of the Lord! He says, 'Don't be afraid. The battle belongs to Me and not to you.'"

16-17. "Tomorrow morning, march against your enemies. They'll be coming up the mountain gorge that leads to the open country near Tekoa. You won't have to fight them. Just go there and see what I will do for you."

Don't be afraid. Go out in the morning, and I'll go with you.'"

18-19. Jehoshaphat fell on his knees and bowed to the ground in thanksgiving, as did all the people. Then the Levites stood up and praised the Lord with singing.

20. Early the next morning when the troops got ready to march out, Jehoshaphat said to them, "Men, listen to me! Have faith in God, and He will help you. Believe what the prophet told us, and you will succeed."

21. Then he ordered the Levites to put on their choir robes and march out ahead of the army singing, "Praise the Lord! Give thanks to Him. His mercy and love never fail."

22-23. Jehoshaphat went with his men, and as they neared Tekoa, the choir sang again. Then the Lord went ahead of them and threw the armies of these nations into confusion. They got into an argument and started fighting each other.

24-26. When the men of Judah arrived, they saw nothing but dead bodies. Jehoshaphat and his men plundered the camps and found so much equipment and many items of value that it took them three days to carry it all away. On the fourth day they praised the Lord for what He had done. After that the valley was called the Valley of Praise.

27-30. Then the king led the Levites and his men back to Jerusalem. When they got there they marched to the Temple singing praises to God. The fear of the Lord came on all the neighboring nations when they heard what God had done for His people. So Judah had peace on all sides.

Jehoshaphat's Reign Ends

31-33. Jehoshaphat became king when he was thirty-five years old and

reigned for twenty-five years. He followed the example of his father Asa's earlier years and did what was right. And he never changed. But the pagan shrines in the mountains around Jerusalem were never destroyed, and some of the people still went there to worship idols.

34. Everything that Jehoshaphat did was recorded by the prophet Jehu and can be found in the books of Kings.

35-36. Before Jehoshaphat died he made a treaty with Ahaziah, the new king of Israel, who was as wicked as his father Ahab. Together he and Jehoshaphat built a fleet of ships to expand their trade.

37. Then the prophet Eliezer went to see Jehoshaphat and said to him, "Because you didn't learn your lesson the first time when the Lord told you not to make a treaty with wicked kings, He will destroy your ships." So a huge storm came and wrecked all the ships. They never did sail to Spain.

Jehoram Becomes King

21 When Jehoshaphat died, they buried him in Jerusalem. He had seven sons. He had given each of them gifts of silver and gold and put them in charge of various cities throughout the country. But he chose Jehoram, his oldest son, to be king.

4-7. After Jehoram was firmly in control, he had his six brothers killed. He was thirty-two years old when he became king of Judah and ruled for eight years. But he followed the example of the wicked kings of Israel. He had married Jezebel's daughter, which made matters worse. But because of the promise the Lord had made to David, He would not destroy David's descendants.

8-10. Now the Edomites rebelled and

set up their own king. So Jehoram took his army and went to put down the rebellion, but the Edomites surrounded him. During the night, Jehoram and his men were able to break through the lines and escape. So Edom became independent because Jehoram had turned away from the Lord.

11. Jehoram became very wicked. He even built shrines to pagan gods in the hills around Jerusalem and throughout the country.

12-13. One day he got a letter from Elijah the prophet. It said, "This is what the Lord says: 'You have not followed the example of your father or grandfather who did what was right. But you followed the example of Ahab, and even killed your own brothers.

14-15. " 'The Lord will bring sickness on your whole family and on the people. You will come down with a painful condition and die. In addition, the Lord will let your enemies come and take away all your possessions.' "

16-17. So the Lord let the Philistines, the Arabians, and the Ethiopians come against Judah. They invaded the land and began attacking the cities. They came to Jerusalem and carried off all the valuables in the palace, including the king's family. His youngest son was the only one left.

18-20. Then Jehoram came down with a painful condition, and after two years he died. The people did not honor him as they had his father and grandfather. He ruled the country for only eight years. When he died, no one mourned for him, and he was not buried beside the other kings of Judah.

was Jezebel's daughter. He reigned for only one year. He followed the example of his grandparents Ahab and Jezebel, which his mother urged him to do.

4-6. After his father Jehoram died, he sinned even more by bringing members of Ahab's family to Jerusalem as advisers. He listened to them and joined his uncle, Joram, the king of Israel, to fight the Syrians. During the battle Joram was wounded. He was taken back to his other palace in Jezreel. And Ahaziah went to visit him.

7. Then the Lord decided to stop their wickedness. He had a prophet anoint Jehu as king of Israel and told him to put an end to the royal house of Ahab.

8-9. So Jehu went and killed King Joram, the son of Ahab, and told his men to capture Ahaziah, who was heading for Jerusalem. They caught up with him and brought him back to Jehu, who had him executed. Out of respect for his grandfather Jehoshaphat, they gave him an honorable burial. So no one was left to rule Judah.

The Queen Mother Rules

10. When Ahaziah's mother heard that her son was dead, she appointed herself as queen. She was determined that no one from the family of David would ever rule Judah again. So she had every male descendant of David that she could find killed.

11-12. Ahaziah's sister took one-year-old Joash and hid him in her bedroom. She was the wife of the high priest and lived in an apartment at the Temple. So the queen couldn't find little Joash. He lived with the high priest for the next six years.

Ahaziah Becomes King

22 Then the people made Jehoram's son Ahaziah king of Judah. His mother, Athaliah,

The Boy King

23 When Joash was seven years old, the high priest decided he must do something about

the situation in the country. He talked to the five commanders of the army, and they agreed to help him.

2-3. First, they went to all the cities in Judah and brought the Levites, priests, and other leaders to Jerusalem. They all took an oath to be loyal to young Joash. Then the high priest said to them, "This is the son of our late king and a descendant of David. He's the one who should rule Judah, not the queen mother. She's the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel.

4-6. "So this is what I want you to do: As you take up your Sabbath duties, a third of you will keep an eye on the Temple gates; a third will watch the palace; and a third will be at the main entrance. Don't let anyone come into the Temple except the Levites and priests. All others must be kept out.

7. "Those of you who had Sabbath off should come for the ceremony and stand by the king's son with your weapons. Anyone who tries to force his way into the inner courtyard of the Temple should be killed."

8-9. They did exactly what the high priest told them. The commanders asked the men going off duty to stay by, and the high priest gave them the spears and shields of David stored in the Temple.

10-11. When the time came, the high priest stationed the men with their weapons where the little prince would stand. Then he brought out Joash, and put a crown on his head and a copy of the Scripture in his hand. He anointed him with oil and proclaimed him king of Judah. Then all those present shouted, "Long live the king!"

The Death of the Queen Mother

12. The queen mother heard shouting in the Temple and saw people running there from everywhere. She wondered

what was going on. So she took her guards and went to see for herself.

13. There in the courtyard she saw Joash standing by the entrance of the Holy Place, surrounded by officers and men. The people were shouting, "Long live the king!" The musicians were blowing their trumpets, and the choir was singing praises to the Lord. Then she tore her royal robe and shouted, "Treason! Treason!"

14-15. The high priest saw her and told the officers to get her out of the Temple and then execute her. They caught her just as she reached the gate by the palace, and did what the high priest had said.

16-17. Then the high priest had the young king and everyone there take an oath of loyalty to the Lord. After that, the people went to the temple of Baal, tore it down, smashed the altars and idols, and killed the high priest of Baal.

18. The high priest put the Levites and priests in charge of the work of the Temple. He gave each one their duties, as David had done when he was king. He also told them to offer sacrifices and present offerings to the Lord, as Moses had directed.

19-21. He stationed guards at the gates of the Temple and asked them to be careful who they let in. Then he led the young king, the commanders, and the leaders of Judah to the palace, where Joash took his seat as king. This made the people happy, for they were glad for their new king. And Jerusalem was now quiet and at peace.

The Temple Repaired

24 Joash was seven years old when he became king, and he ruled for forty years. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. When he was old enough to get married, the high priest picked out two

girls for him. Joash married them and had many sons and daughters.

4-5. Sometime later, Joash decided to repair the Temple. So he called in the Levites and priests and said to them, "I want you to go throughout the country and collect the yearly Temple tax as quickly as you can." But they kept putting it off.

6. Then Joash called in the high priest and asked, "Why didn't you get the Levites and priests to do it? After all, this is the tax the Lord told Moses the people should pay to keep up the Temple."

7. During the reign of the wicked queen mother the Temple had been broken into and damaged. Her sons had taken the sacred things and used them in the temple of Baal to worship him.

8-10. Joash was impatient with the delay in collecting the Temple tax. So he had a chest made and placed it at the entrance of the Temple. Then he sent an announcement throughout the country that people should bring their tax money to Jerusalem and put it in the chest. The people did it gladly until all the tax was in.

11. At the end of each day the Levites would bring the chest inside and call the king's officials to come and open it. The next morning they would put the chest back. It wasn't long before they had a large amount of money with which to repair the Temple.

12-13. Then the king and the high priest gave money to the men in charge of the repair work. In turn, they hired carpenters and masons, and others who could work with iron and bronze. The supervisors were honest men committed to restoring the Temple as quickly as possible.

14. When they finished, they had money left over. They gave it to the high priest, who used the silver and

gold to make things that were needed for the Temple. Then he began holding services, and offered sacrifices to the Lord every day as long as he lived. **15-16.** He was 130 years old when he died, and they buried him in Jerusalem next to the kings because of all the good he had done for the country and for the Temple.

Joash Listens to False Counsel

17-19. After the high priest died, some of the officials persuaded Joash to join them in worshiping idols. Under their influence the people had gone back to worshiping idols, especially the mother goddess. The Lord was not happy with all this. Even though He warned them by sending them prophets, they wouldn't listen.

20-21. Then the Spirit came on Zechariah, who said to the people, "This is what the Lord says: 'Why do you keep on disobeying Me? You know I can't bless you this way. You have forsaken Me, and I will have to forsake you.'" But the people turned on Zechariah and, with the king's permission, stoned him to death right in the Temple.

22. Joash had forgotten how Zechariah's father, the high priest, had saved his life when he was little. He had hidden him in the Temple to keep the wicked queen mother from finding him. As Zechariah was dying, he said to the king, "May the Lord hold you accountable for what you have done."

The Death of Joash

23-24. Then the Lord let the Syrians come and attack Jerusalem. They killed all the officials and took everything of value back to Damascus. Even though the Syrian army was small, the Lord saw to it that it defeated Joash's larger army. This was

the way the Lord punished the people of Judah for what they were doing.

25. During the battle Joash was wounded. So after the Syrians left, he went home and stayed in bed to recover. Then two of his officials came in to see him and killed him. This was to pay him back for what he had done to Zechariah. So they buried him, but not in the royal tombs of the kings.

26. The mother of the first official had come to Judah from Ammon and the mother of the other official from Moab.

27. Everything that Joash did in his early life for the Temple and in his later life against the prophet Zechariah is also recorded in the books of Kings. Then Joash's son Amaziah became the next king.

Amaziah's Reign

25 Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he took his father's place as king of Judah. He ruled the country for twenty-nine years. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not with his whole heart.

3-4. When he was firmly in control of things, he arrested and executed the two officials who had killed his father. But he did not kill their sons, because the Lord had told Moses that children should not be made to suffer for what their fathers had done.

War Against Edom

5-6. Amaziah assigned all the men in the country from twenty years old and up to military units according to their ancestral houses. He had 300,000 men fit for war. He paid a large amount of silver to hire another 100,000 men from Israel. Now he felt that he was ready to go to war against Edom.

7-8. But the Lord sent a prophet to Amaziah, who said to him, "You are

not to use the troops from Israel to help you because the Lord is not with them. You may think that they will be a help to you, but they won't. The Lord can help you win or see to it that you're defeated."

9-10. Amaziah responded, "But what about all the silver I paid to hire them?" The prophet answered, "Obedience is more important. The Lord can give you much more than that." So Amaziah sent the troops from Israel back home. They were very upset, and left hating the people of Judah.

11-12. Then Amaziah took courage and with faith marched against Edom. The armies met in the Valley of Salt, and Amaziah defeated them. Thousands of enemy troops were killed and thousands were taken captive. Then he took those captured to the top of a high cliff and pushed them over. They were all killed on the rocks below.

13. The hired troops from Israel that Amaziah had sent home decided to raid the cities of Judah. They killed 3,000 people and took huge amounts of plunder.

14-15. After Amaziah had defeated the Edomites he took their gods back home to Jerusalem where he offered sacrifices to them. The Lord was very unhappy over this. So He sent a prophet to Amaziah who said, "Why are you worshiping these idols? Did they help you win the war?"

16. Amaziah got very upset and yelled at the prophet, "Stop! Who asked you to be my adviser? If you don't stop, I'll have you arrested." The prophet answered, "I'll stop, but let me say this: God will punish you for what you're doing." Then he left.

Judah and Israel Go to War

17. Amaziah asked his advisers what to do about Israel's raids into Judah.

They told him to challenge King Jehoash to a fight. So he sent this message to the king of Israel: "Let's face each other in battle and settle our differences once and for all."

18-19. Jehoash sent this message back: "Once there was a thorn bush in the hills of Lebanon that wanted to marry the daughter of a cedar tree. But a wild animal came along and walked all over the bush. Do you think that because you defeated the Edomites, you can defeat me? That victory has made you proud. Stay home, or I'll come and walk all over you."

20-22. But Amaziah wouldn't listen. So the Lord let the king of Israel defeat Amaziah because he depended on the gods of Edom. The armies met just over the border in Judah where Amaziah was defeated. Then his men turned and ran as fast as they could.

23-24. Jehoash captured Amaziah and the few men who had stayed with him. He marched them in disgrace back to Jerusalem. When they got there Jehoash broke down part of the city wall and took all the silver and gold from the Temple and palace, plus some hostages, and went back to Samaria.

The Death of Amaziah

25-26. Amaziah ruled Judah for fifteen more years after Jehoash, the king of Israel, died. Everything that Amaziah did is also recorded in the books of Kings.

27-28. Because Amaziah had turned against the Lord and had lost the war with Israel, some of his men planned to kill him. When he heard about it, he left Jerusalem and fled to the city of Lachish. But they followed him there and killed him. They brought his body back and buried it in Jerusalem.

Uzziah Becomes King

26 Then the people made sixteen-year-old Uzziah king in place of his father. One of the first things he did was to take the city of Elath on the gulf and make it part of Judah. This gave him access to the sea.

3-4. Uzziah ruled Judah for fifty-two years. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father, Amaziah, had first done. Yet he never removed the rest of the pagan shrines still in the country.

5. He served the Lord as long as the prophet Zechariah was alive. The prophet guided the king by the visions and dreams the Lord gave him. As long as Uzziah listened and obeyed, the Lord blessed him.

6-8. Uzziah fought off the Philistines, and took several of their cities. Some he rebuilt and fortified and made them part of Judah. The Lord also helped him against the Arabians, and the Ammonites submitted to him without a fight. Uzziah became very powerful and was respected by other nations all the way to the border of Egypt.

9-10. Uzziah fortified Jerusalem and restored the section of the wall that King Jehoash of Israel had broken down. He dug lots of wells for his large herds of animals and built watchtowers to protect them from robbers. He loved farming and encouraged the people to plant vineyards and work the land.

11-15. The king had a well-equipped army ready for war. There were more than 370,000 men under 2,600 officers, all organized by divisions. They had shields, swords, spears, armor, helmets, and bows and arrows. They also had devices that could sling huge rocks at an attacking army. Uzziah became very powerful because the Lord was with him.

Uzziah's Pride

16-18. But Uzziah became proud and thought he could do anything. So one day he went inside the Temple and right into the Holy Place to offer incense to the Lord. The high priest with eighty of his priests tried to stop him. They told him that only priests were allowed in there and that if he went in, the Lord could not bless him.

19-20. But Uzziah became very angry and forced his way into the Holy Place. While he was offering incense, he suddenly broke out with leprosy on his forehead. The priests looked at him in horror, told him what had happened, and rushed him out of the Temple. There was no doubt in the king's mind that the Lord had punished him.

21. Uzziah had leprosy the rest of his life. He was relieved of his responsibilities as king and moved into a separate house. So his son Jotham took over the government and ruled for his father. Never again was Uzziah allowed to set foot in the Temple.

22-23. Everything he did was written down by the prophet Isaiah. When Uzziah died, he was buried in the cemetery of kings but not in the royal tombs, because of his leprosy. Then Jotham became king.

Jotham Becomes King

27 Jotham was twenty-five years old when he began to reign and he ruled Judah for sixteen years. He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his father had done when he first became king. Jotham respected the Lord and did not force his way into the Holy Place, as his father had done. But he did let the people worship their idols.

3-4. Jotham rebuilt the upper gate of the Temple and did lots of repair work on the city wall. He also had

new cities built, as well as fortifications and watchtowers in the hills.

5-6. He defeated the Ammonites, and they agreed to pay him thousands of pounds of silver and thousands of bushels of wheat and barley for the next three years. He became a very powerful king because he trusted the Lord and obeyed Him.

7-9. Everything that Jotham did, including his wars and all the good he did, is recorded in the books of Kings. When he died, he was buried in Jerusalem, and his son Ahaz became the next king.

Ahaz Becomes King

28 Ahaz was 20 years old when he began to reign. He ruled Judah for 16 years. But unlike his father, he did evil in the sight of the Lord. He followed the example of the kings of Israel, made images of Baal, and set them up everywhere.

3-4. He burned incense to Baal in the valley outside Jerusalem, and even sacrificed his baby son to an idol called Molech. He did all the wicked things that the original people living in Canaan had done. He offered sacrifices to Baal on all the hilltops around Jerusalem and under every huge tree that caught his attention.

Syria and Israel Attack Judah

5-6. Because of his wickedness the Lord removed His protection from Ahaz and let the Syrians come and defeat him. They took many people captive and then took them back to Damascus with them. The Lord also let Israel attack Judah. In one day they killed thousands of men. All this happened because the people had forsaken the Lord.

7-8. During the fighting, one of Israel's warriors killed Ahaz's son, the officer

in charge of the king's guard, and the man next in command to the king. The Israelites took thousands of wives and children back to Samaria, as well as huge amounts of plunder.

The Lord Steps In

9. When Pekah, the king of Israel, and his troops got home, the prophet Obed went out to meet the king and said, "You were able to defeat the armies of Judah because the Lord let you do so. But you were cruel and killed people as if they were nothing. The Lord will not overlook this."

10-11. "You also brought back many men, women, and children from Judah to make them your slaves. By doing this you're sinning against the Lord still more. So listen. Send these people back home. They're your brothers and sisters. The Lord is not happy with what you have done."

12-13. Then four officials went and stood before the troops coming back from war and said, "Don't bring these people here. We have sinned against the Lord. This will only make things worse. He is already displeased with our cruelty, and this will only add to our guilt if we make these people our slaves."

14-15. So the king released the people and asked his officials to take them back home. Many of them were half-naked and had not eaten for some time. They were given clothes and food, their wounds were treated, and those who were too weak to walk were given donkeys. The officials took the people back to Judah and then returned home.

Ahaz Asks Assyria for Help

16-18. About this time Ahaz asked the king of Assyria to help him. The Edomites had attacked Judah and

taken many cities and many captives. The Philistines had also taken a number of cities.

19-21. The Lord let this happen to Ahaz to punish him for leading the people deeper into sin. But instead of helping Ahaz, the king of Assyria turned against him. Then Ahaz gave him all the valuable things from the Temple and the palace. Ahaz even gave his sons, the princes, to the king of Assyria. This kept him away for a while, but not for long.

The Death of Ahaz

22-23. Ahaz didn't learn from all this, but sinned even more. He offered sacrifices to the same gods the Syrians did, because he thought that these gods would give him the same power the Syrians had. But this only made matters worse and brought the country to the edge of ruin.

24-25. Ahaz did even more terrible things. He destroyed all the Temple articles used for worship, and then locked the doors. He set up pagan altars on every street corner in Jerusalem and built places of idol worship in every city in the country. This really made the Lord unhappy.

26-27. All the things that Ahaz did are also recorded in the books of Kings. He died and was buried beside his ancestors in Jerusalem, but not in the royal tombs. Then his son Hezekiah took over.

Hezekiah Becomes King

29 Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he began to reign. He ruled the country for twenty-nine years. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as his ancestor David had done.

2-5. The first thing he did was to reopen the Temple and repair the dam-

age. Then he called the priests and Levites to come to the Temple. He said to them, "Listen to me. I want you to consecrate yourselves to God. Then take all the rubbish out of the Temple and clean it up. This is the house of God.

6-7. "Our fathers were unfaithful to the Lord and stopped worshiping at God's house. They locked the Temple doors, let the lamps go out, and stopped offering sacrifices and incense to Him.

8-9. "That's why the Lord has let all these troubles come on us. Other people are shocked at what has happened to Judah and Jerusalem. We have become objects of contempt and scorn. This is why our men have been killed in battle and our women and children taken captive.

10-11. "I want to renew our commitment to God. Then He can protect us again, and our enemies will stop attacking us. We will feel safe again. You are the spiritual sons of Judah. So be faithful to the Lord and take care of His house. He has chosen you to offer sacrifices and burn incense to Him."

12-15. The Levites listened to Hezekiah. They were all descendants of the three sons of Levi. Later, they called together the Levites who had not been present, and they too consecrated themselves to the Lord. Then they purified the Temple, carefully following the instructions the Lord had given to Moses.

16. Then the priests consecrated themselves again and went into the sanctuary itself and purified it. Everything that should not have been in the Temple was brought into the courtyard and then taken down to the valley and burned.

17. The Levites and priests began purifying the Temple and the sanctuary

on the first day of the first month. It took them eight days to purify the Temple and another eight days for the sanctuary.

18-19. Then they went to see the king and said to him, "We've purified the Temple and the sanctuary and everything in them. We've also replaced all the furniture and other pieces that your father Ahaz destroyed. We've set them in the courtyard next to the altar and dedicated them to the Lord."

The Temple Worship Begins

20-21. Early the next morning the king called together the officials of the city and went with them to the Temple. They brought seven young bulls and seven rams, lambs, and goats as sin offerings for the people.

22-24. The priests sacrificed the young bulls, the rams, and lambs on the altar. Then they brought the goats before the king and his officials and had them lay their hands on them as a sign of confession. Then they sacrificed them to the Lord as sin offerings for the people.

25-26. Hezekiah also had Levites come with harps and cymbals, and the priests with trumpets, to accompany the people in singing praises to the Lord.

27-28. The king asked that a whole burnt offering be placed on the altar. Then the people bowed before the Lord in worship. While the sacrifice was burning, they sang praises to God, accompanied by trumpets and other instruments.

29-30. When the sacrifice was consumed and the offerings were finished, the king and the people knelt before the Lord and worshiped Him. Then Hezekiah and the leaders asked the Levites to sing songs of praise

that David had written. All the people joined in and sang with joy as the service came to a close.

31. Before Hezekiah dismissed the people he said to them, "Now that you have given your hearts to the Lord anew, feel free to bring your sacrifices and offerings to the Temple." So that's what the people did. They brought sacrifices of thanksgiving and many other sacrifices as well.

32-33. Without being asked, the people brought seventy young bulls, 100 rams, and 200 lambs as regular offerings. Together with the peace offerings, they had brought a total of 600 young bulls and 3,000 sheep. Most of these were peace offerings to be eaten by families and friends in a festival of thanksgiving.

34-35. But there were too few priests to handle all the sacrifices. So the Levites had to help. They were carefully chosen to temporarily serve until more priests could be found. The priests were the ones responsible for the drink and bread offerings that went along with the sacrifices.

36. So the worship services at the Temple began again, and Hezekiah and the people rejoiced over what the Lord had done.

The Passover

30 Hezekiah sent word throughout Judah and to other tribes that the Passover would be kept again. It was decided to delay it for a month from the regular time, which the Lord allowed in cases like this.

3-4. One reason the Passover hadn't been celebrated was that there were not enough priests to handle the sacrifices. Another was that the people hadn't been interested. Now the king and the people agreed that it was time

to start keeping the Passover again.

5. Hezekiah sent out word to Judah and all the tribes of Israel from north to south to come and celebrate the Passover. It had not been done for a long time.

6. So messengers were sent throughout Judah and Israel with this invitation from Hezekiah: "People of Israel, we are one. It's time to return to the Lord and obey the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then the Lord will return to us and bless us, especially those who escaped from Assyria to come back home.

7-8. "Let's not be like our fathers who were unfaithful to the Lord. He had to discipline us so much that the neighboring countries were shocked and disgusted with us. So don't be stubborn as our fathers were. Give yourselves to the Lord again and show it by coming to the Temple. Let's serve the Lord. Then He can protect us as He used to do.

9. "If you return to the Lord, the surrounding nations will be merciful to our people and let them come back home. The Lord is kind and full of compassion. He will not turn away from us if we don't turn away from Him."

10-12. So the messengers went throughout Judah and all the way up into Israel. Many people up north made fun of them. But some did listen. They were sorry for what they had done, and came to Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit worked on their hearts and gave them unity. As one man, they prepared for the Passover.

13-14. A month later more people came to Jerusalem to keep the Passover and the festival that followed. They broke down all the pagan altars in Jerusalem and threw the pieces in the valley below.

15-16. On the fourteenth day of that

month a lamb was sacrificed and the Passover began. The people had more zeal than some of the priests. So they consecrated themselves again and took their places in the Temple, offering sacrifices to the Lord according to the law. And the Levites did all they could to help.

17-18. Many from the north of Israel who were not ritually clean had to ask the Levites to kill the Passover lamb for them. Others who were not ritually clean had already killed their Passover lamb.

19-20. Then Hezekiah prayed for them and said, "O Lord, forgive them. I know You forgive those who worship You with all their hearts, even if they haven't gone through the cleansing ritual." The Lord heard the king's prayer and forgave the people.

21-22. So they celebrated the Passover, as well as the Festival of Bread that followed, with joy in their hearts. Every day the choirs of priests and Levites sang praises to the Lord. The king complimented them for knowing what needed to be done and encouraged them to continue. Everyone there ate from the sacrifices and praised the God of Israel.

23-24. When the week was over, the people decided to stay another week. Hezekiah donated 1,000 young bulls and 7,000 sheep to the festival, and the leaders gave 1,000 young bulls and 10,000 sheep. During this extra week more priests set themselves apart for the Lord.

25-27. All the people were happy—those from Judah, those from Israel, the priests and Levites, as well as the foreigners living in the country. Such happiness and joy had not been seen in Jerusalem since the days of Solomon. Then the priests and Levites prayed for the people and

asked the Lord to bless them. And He did.

Other Temple Services

31 After the people celebrated the Passover, they went to every city in the country and destroyed all the idols. They also destroyed the pagan altars and cut down the poles of the mother goddess. Then they went home.

2-3. Hezekiah set up the rotation of priests and Levites that David had put in place. They were to offer sacrifices and sing praises to the Lord every day. The king donated animals from his own flocks and herds for the daily offerings and extra sacrifices on the Sabbath and other appointed festivals.

4-5. He also told the people to bring their tithes and offerings to the Temple for the priests and Levites so they could do their work. When the people heard about it, they gladly brought their tithes and offerings from their harvests and flocks and herds.

6-7. When the people in other cities heard about it, they were eager to do the same thing. They began bringing their tithes and offerings the very next month and continued until the seventh month.

8-10. When Hezekiah and his officials came to the Temple and saw the large amount of tithes and offerings, they praised the Lord and thanked the people. Then the king asked the high priest if there was enough to pay the priests and Levites. The high priest said, "The people have been so faithful there's more than we need."

11-13. So Hezekiah ordered them to build more storerooms, and the Levites put the extra tithes and offerings from the harvests in there. Then the king and the high priest appointed ten additional men to help them.

14-15. Kore, who was in charge of the East Gate, was also asked to be in charge of the tithes and offerings and to see to it that the priests and Levites were paid. What was left over was kept in the Temple. He had six assistants to help him look after the priests and Levites wherever they lived.

16-19. Every Levite from twenty years old and up who ministered at the Temple was taken care of, including his wife and children. The priests were taken care of the same way. And those who lived out in the country were also taken care of. No descendant of Aaron was left out.

20-21. Hezekiah made sure that all this was done in the whole country. He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and was faithful in all that he did. He stayed close to God and kept His commandments. He put his whole heart into everything he did for the Lord, and God blessed him for it.

Assyria Invades Judah

32 After all the things that Hezekiah had done for the Lord, there was peace in the land. Then the king of Assyria decided to attack. He wanted to make Judah part of his empire. Hezekiah knew that the Assyrians would not stop until they took Jerusalem.

3-4. So he talked to his officials and army officers, and together they decided to plug up the water supply outside the city until the water stopped. They didn't want to supply the Assyrian army with water.

5-6. After they cut off the water supply, the king asked the men to strengthen the city's defenses. They repaired the wall and built more defense towers. They also extended the wall to protect the Pool of Siloam, which was their water supply. Then

Hezekiah had extra spears and shields made for all the men of the city and put the men under officers.

7-8. Hezekiah brought them together and said to them, "Let's not be afraid of the king of Assyria and his huge army, because we have God on our side. So take courage. The king of Assyria is depending on men, but we're depending on God. He will fight our battles for us." When the troops and the people heard that, they all took courage.

9-10. When the king of Assyria was laying siege to another city only thirty miles away, he sent this message to Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem: "I have invaded your land and have already taken some of your cities. What makes you think that you can stand up against me?"

11-12. "Don't believe your king when he tells you that your God will save you. He's lying. You'll only end up starving to death trapped in the city. Didn't your king destroy all the altars in the country where people worshiped, and made you bring sacrifices to the altar at the Temple? Do you think your God is happy about that?"

13-15. "You know what I and my ancestors have done to people who resisted us. Were their gods able to save them? Do you think that your God can do it? Don't believe what your king tells you. No god has been able to resist us, and your God can't either."

16-17. Then the Assyrian messengers said some very bad things against the God of Israel. But Hezekiah and the people said nothing. When the messengers told the king of Assyria what happened, he sent this message to Hezekiah: "No gods can stand up against me; neither can your God."

18-19. This time the messengers shouted to the people on the walls, to

frighten them to surrender. They talked to them about the God of Israel as if He were just any god.

An Angel Defeats an Army

20-21. Then Hezekiah and Isaiah prayed for help. The Lord heard their prayers and sent an angel into the Assyrian camp, and he killed 185,000 troops. When the king of Assyria, who was in another part of Judah, heard this, he took the rest of his men and went home. There his two sons killed him while he was worshiping in the temple of his god.

22-23. This is how the Lord answered Hezekiah and Isaiah's prayer and saved Jerusalem. After that, Judah had peace on all sides. Many from across the country came to Jerusalem with thank offerings, and gifts for Hezekiah.

Hezekiah's Sickness

24. When Hezekiah got sick and was about to die, he earnestly prayed to the Lord to get well. God answered his prayer and gave him a sign that in three days he would recover. And he did.

25-26. But after the Lord had answered Hezekiah's prayer, he became proud and forgot how good God had been to him. The Lord was not pleased with him or with the people, who also had become proud. Then the king and the people repented of their pride, so God postponed His discipline until after Hezekiah's death.

27-29. Hezekiah became so rich that he had to build extra storerooms for his silver, gold, precious stones, and other valuables. He also had extra storerooms built for his overflow harvests, and barns and enclosures for his cattle and sheep. The Lord blessed Hezekiah, and he became very wealthy.

30. Before the king of Assyria planned to take Jerusalem, Hezekiah set out to make a tunnel for the water from the spring in the valley to flow into the city. He not only finished that, but did many other things.

31. One day the exiled king of Babylon sent messengers to ask Hezekiah about the sign God had given him that he would get well. But Hezekiah didn't talk about the great things that God had done. Instead, he talked about his own great riches and the wealth of Jerusalem. The Lord let these messengers come to test Hezekiah, but his heart was full of pride again.

The Death of Hezekiah

32-33. Everything that Hezekiah did was recorded by Isaiah the prophet and is found in the books of Kings. When Hezekiah died he was buried in the royal tombs alongside his ancestors. The people showed him great honor at his funeral. Then his son Manasseh became the next king.

Manasseh's Reign

33 Manasseh was only twelve years old when he became king. He ruled the country for 55 years, doing evil in the eyes of the Lord. He rebuilt the pagan places of worship that his father had destroyed, built altars to Baal and the mother goddess, and even worshiped the sun, moon, and stars.

4-6. He also erected inside the Temple pagan altars to the star figures in the night sky. He sacrificed his baby sons to these pagan gods in the valley outside Jerusalem. He practiced witchcraft, consulted spirits, and listened to the advice of demons. He did more evil than all other kings before him.

7-8. He took the carved image of the

mother goddess and set it up in the Temple. He forgot that the Lord had said to David, "The Temple will be Mine and the people should come there to worship Me. I will protect My people as long as they keep the laws and commandments that I gave to Moses."

9-10. But Manasseh led the people deeper into sin, until they did more evil than the pagans who lived there before had done. The Lord even sent prophets to warn the king and the people, but they didn't listen to them and paid no attention to what they said.

11-12. So the Lord let the new king of Assyria come against Judah and take Manasseh prisoner. The Assyrian king put a hook in Manasseh's nose and led him away in chains. Then Manasseh turned to the Lord and begged for forgiveness.

13. The Lord heard Manasseh's prayer and forgave him. Suddenly the king of Assyria released Manasseh and let him go home. These things convinced Manasseh that the Lord was the true God of Israel.

14-15. When Manasseh got back home, he made the walls of Jerusalem higher, made the fortifications stronger, and stationed troops in all the major cities of Judah. He took away the idols, pagan images, and altars from the Temple and threw them out of the city.

16-17. He restored the altar of the Lord and brought thank offerings and peace offerings to be sacrificed on it. He urged the people to stop worshipping idols and to worship only the God of Israel. The people partially obeyed, but not all the way. While they did offer sacrifices to the Lord, they did it on pagan altars and wherever they pleased.

The Death of Manasseh

18-19. Everything that Manasseh did, the warning messages he received from the prophets, and his captivity experience are all recorded in the books of Kings. Also all the wicked things he did before he was taken captive are found in the writings of the prophets.

20. When Manasseh died, he was buried in the royal gardens next to the palace, not in the royal tombs with the other kings. Then his son Amon became king.

Amon's Reign

21-23. Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign. He ruled for only two years. He, too, did evil in the eyes of the Lord, as his father had done before he was taken captive. He worshiped all the idols his father had worshiped, and offered sacrifices to them. He did not repent, as his father had in prison. He continued to sin even more than his father had done.

24-25. His officials plotted against him and killed him in his own palace. Then the people killed those who had done it and made his son Josiah the next king.

Josiah's Reign

34 Josiah was eight years old when he became king. He ruled the country for thirty-one years, doing right in the eyes of the Lord. He was faithful to God, as David was and didn't turn to the right or the left.

3. When he was sixteen years old, he began serving the Lord even more than before. When he was twenty, he started getting rid of the pagan places of worship and other idols in Jerusalem and Judah.

4. He broke down the altars of Baal

and destroyed the wooden images of the mother goddess and other idols. He had the idols ground to powder and scattered on the graves of those who worshiped them.

5-7. He also had the bones of the priests who served these idols dug up and burned on their pagan altars. That finally stopped the open worship of idols. Then he did the same thing in certain parts of Israel, where he broke down the altars and ground the idols to powder. After that he returned home to Jerusalem.

The Book of the Law

8. It took more than five years for Josiah to clear the land of idols. Then he ordered the mayor of Jerusalem, the city recorder, and another official to repair the Temple.

9-10. So the mayor and the other two went to the high priest and gave him the offering money that the people had given the Levites when they came to Jerusalem to worship. The high priest gave the money to the supervisors to pay the workers and for them to buy the supplies they needed.

11-13. So the carpenters and masons bought what they needed to repair the Temple. They did their work well. They were supervised by four Levites who were not only skilled musicians but also skilled builders. Their job was to make sure that things were done right. Other Levites kept records and served as guards.

14-15. One day as the high priest was getting money from the Temple treasury, he found a copy of the book of Deuteronomy that someone had hidden there. He said to the king's secretary, "Look! I found a copy of the book of the law written by Moses," and he gave it to him.

16-17. The secretary went and gave

the king a report on the progress of the repairs. He said, "Everything you asked us to do is being done. We gave the offering money to the high priest, who gave it to the supervisors to pay the workers and to buy supplies."

18-19. Then he said, "The high priest found this book hidden in the Temple treasury and gave it to me." King Josiah asked him to read what it said. He did, and when Josiah heard what was written, he stood up and tore his robe in grief.

20-21. Then the king asked the high priest, three officials, and the royal secretary to find out what this meant. He said to them, "I need to know what Moses had in mind, and so do our people. It sounds like the Lord is very unhappy and ready to discipline us. We and our ancestors have not done what the book tells us to do."

22. So the high priest and the other four went to see Huldah the prophetess. She lived in Jerusalem, and her husband was in charge of the king's clothes and the robes the priests wore in the Temple.

23-25. Huldah listened to them and said, "This is what the God of Israel says: 'Tell the king that I will discipline My people just as the book says. They have turned their backs on Me to worship idols. I can't overlook this, but will have to punish them for what they have done.'

26-27. "Also tell the king that the Lord says, 'I noticed how you humbled yourself and tore your robe in grief when they read the book to you. I also saw how you repented and wept over what was written. I have decided to answer your prayers.

28. "Soon I will let you sleep in peace next to your fathers. That way you won't see the troubles that will come on Jerusalem and Judah.'" Then the

high priest and the others left and took Huldah's message back to the king.

Josiah Calls for Commitment

29-30. When Josiah heard what the Lord had said, he took all the leaders, together with the priests and Levites, to the Temple to worship the Lord. The people were there too, rich and poor alike. The king read to them from the book of the law so they could hear what the Lord had said.

31. Josiah stood by the royal pillar in the courtyard and renewed Israel's commitment to the Lord. He promised to obey the Lord with all his heart and soul and mind. He promised to keep God's commandments and to carry out all the instructions in the book.

32. Then he asked the people to stand and promise to obey the Lord. They did, and promised to do everything according to the covenant that God had made with their ancestors.

33. Josiah destroyed every idol he could find. As long as he lived he served the Lord with all his heart and led everyone to worship the God of Israel.

Josiah and the Passover

35 Then Josiah decided to celebrate the Passover. On the fourteenth day of the first month he had the Passover lamb killed, just as the Lord had said. He assigned priests their duties and told the Levites to put the ark back in the Most Holy Place and stop carrying it around from place to place.

3-6. The king told the priests and Levites to serve the Lord with all their hearts and to take up the duties of the Temple as David and Solomon had arranged them. He also told them to organize things in such a way that when the people came, the priests

and Levites could help them with their sacrifices and take care of their spiritual needs.

7-9. Then Josiah provided the people with all the Passover lambs and other offerings they needed. He gave 30,000 sheep and goats and 3,000 young bulls. The high priest and two leading priests gave 2,600 lambs and 300 young bulls. Six Levite leaders gave 5,000 lambs and 500 young bulls. And the other leaders gave what they could.

10-13. The priests and Levites made all the arrangements for the Passover and took up their positions as ordered by the king. The Passover lambs and other sacrifices were offered to the Lord and were then divided among the people. They roasted the meat from the lambs and boiled the meat from the other offerings as was explained in the law.

14-15. Then the priests and Levites prepared something for themselves. They worked all day right up to sundown. The musicians were also there and sang as arranged years before by David. The Temple guards couldn't leave their posts, so the Levites prepared the Passover lambs for them.

16-17. The people celebrated the Passover and the Festival of Bread that followed with joy in their hearts. All the sacrifices were offered on the Lord's altar as the king had ordered. People from the northern kingdom of Israel also came to keep the Passover together with their brothers from Judah.

18-19. The Passover had not been celebrated with such enthusiasm since the days of the prophet Samuel. No other king had held the Passover with so many priests, Levites, and people from Judah and Israel before. All this took place when Josiah was twenty-six years old.

The Death of Josiah

20. For thirteen years things were peaceful in the country. Then the king of Egypt came through Judah on his way north to fight the Babylonians. Josiah decided to stop him.

21. The king sent this message to Josiah: "I'm not here to attack you. I'm on my way to fight the Babylonians up north by the river Euphrates. Your God told me that I should go through the land of Judah as quickly as I can. So don't try to stop me, or your God will punish you."

22-23. Josiah refused to believe what the king of Egypt said that God had told him. So he called up his troops, disguised himself as a soldier, and went into battle. The two armies met near the city of Megiddo, and Josiah was badly wounded. Then he shouted to his servants, "I'm hit! Get me out of here!"

24. So they carried Josiah away from the fighting, put him in a chariot, and took him back to Jerusalem, where he died. He was buried next to his ancestors in the royal tombs. The whole country was sad and greatly mourned for him.

25-27. The prophet Jeremiah wrote funeral songs for Josiah, which are sung when the people want to remember him. All the things that Josiah did, his love for the Lord, his willing obedience, and his careful keeping of God's commandments, are recorded in the books of Kings.

Jehoahaz, King of Judah

36 After Josiah died, the people made his son Jehoahaz king. He was twenty-three years old when he began to reign, but ruled for only three months.

2-3. The king of Egypt was defeated by the king of Babylon. On his way

back home, he decided to attack Jerusalem. He took Jehoahaz captive and demanded that the people give him thousands of pounds of silver and seventy-five of pounds of gold before he would leave.

4. Then he made Eliakim, the older brother of Jehoahaz, king of Judah and changed his name to Jehoiakim. And he took Jehoahaz as a prisoner with him back to Egypt.

Jehoiakim's Reign

5-6. Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and ruled for eleven years. He did that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord. Later he rebelled against Babylon's control of Judah. So Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem and took Jehoiakim prisoner. He wanted to take him to Babylon, but he died on the way, as Jeremiah had predicted.

7. However, the king did take many other captives with him, and many treasures from the Temple.

8. Everything that Jehoiakim did is recorded in the books of Kings, and his son Jehoiachin took over.

Jehoiachin Becomes King

9. Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign. He ruled for only three months, but he did much evil in the eyes of the Lord.

10. Then the king of Babylon came against Jerusalem again. He took Jehoiachin prisoner, then made his uncle king and changed his uncle's name to Zedekiah. He also took with him many captives and more treasures from the Temple.

Zedekiah, the Last King

11-13. Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king and ruled for eleven years. He too did evil in the

eyes of the Lord and didn't listen to Jeremiah the prophet. Then Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon, even though he had taken an oath to be loyal to him.

14. Zedekiah, the leaders of Judah, the priests, and the people all worshiped idols. They did the most wicked things that you could imagine. And they did them right in the Temple of the Lord.

The Fall of Jerusalem

15-16. Again and again God sent prophets with messages to His people because He loved them. But the people made fun of His prophets until their sin became so great that the Lord had to step in.

17-19. Then God let the Babylonians come against Jerusalem a third time. This time Nebuchadnezzar had no mercy on anyone, young or old, healthy or sick. He took the rest of the treasures from the Temple, and those from the palace, as well as trea-

sures from the houses of the officials.

20-21. Nebuchadnezzar took all the healthy people with him to be his servants or the servants of his sons. The weakest and poorest of the people were left behind. Those he took with him were servants in Babylon for seventy years. During this time the land rested and kept its Sabbaths.

The Decree of Cyrus

22. After Cyrus, the king of Persia, defeated the Babylonians, he released the children of Israel from captivity and let them go home. Years before, the Lord through Jeremiah had said that this would happen.

23. Cyrus put the release of God's people in writing. It read, "This decree is from Cyrus, king of Persia, to all the land. The God of heaven has made me king of Persia and has told me to rebuild His Temple. So those of His people who want to return to Jerusalem may go back. God be with you."

Ezra

INTRODUCTION: *The writer of this book was Ezra. He tells us that the Persian ruler Cyrus let the Hebrew captives go back home. The first Hebrew group returned in 538 B.C. They began rebuilding God's Temple. Over the years other groups returned home. Ezra came back with a group in 457 B.C. He was a priest, and taught the people God's laws. We learn that God kept His promise to watch over His people and to bring them back home.*

The Captivity Ends

1 In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, the Lord kept His promise to free His people and let them go back home. This was the order of Cyrus: "God made me ruler of all the kingdoms that make up Persia. He has given me the responsibility of rebuilding His Temple in Jerusalem.

3-4. "May the God of heaven be with all His people. You are free to go home to rebuild His Temple. If anyone needs help, those who are able should help him. They should provide animals, food, money, gold, and silver for the Temple."

5-6. The leaders, the priests, the Levites, and the people got ready to go. Then their Persian neighbors gave them offerings of silver and gold for the Temple, as well as pack animals and food for their trip home.

7-8. King Cyrus gave back the gold and silver articles that Nebuchadnezzar had taken to Babylon years before. He gave them to Zerubbabel, the prince and leader of the tribe of Judah, for the Temple.

9-11. There were gold and silver offering bowls of all sizes. Altogether the exiles took back with them more

than 5,000 such pieces. This was the first wave of the people who left Babylon to return home.

The First Group of Exiles

2 The people had been living in exile for seventy years, ever since Nebuchadnezzar took them as captives to Babylon.

2-67. Zerubbabel, from Judah, led them back home. There were priests, Levites, Temple musicians, workers, and thousands of others. Altogether there were more than 50,000 people who came back, counting their servants. They came with hundreds of horses, mules, donkeys, and camels.

68-69. When they got back they gathered at the ruins of the Temple and gave thank offerings to God for bringing them safely back home. These thank offerings were used to help rebuild the Temple. They amounted to more than 1,000 pounds of gold and 6,000 pounds of silver, plus robes and clothes for the priests.

70. The priests, Levites, and some of the people settled near the Temple. And the Temple guards, workmen, and musicians settled close by in the villages and towns where they had come from.

Worship Begins Again

3 After the exiles had settled, they all came to Jerusalem for their first worship service. Then Joshua, the high priest, with the help of Zerubbabel, the governor, rebuilt the Temple altar and offered sacrifices to God. They did this in spite of the threats of the many aliens and foreigners who lived in the country.

4-7. Then they celebrated the week-long Festival of Shelters, and each day offered the necessary sacrifices. After the festival the people gave what they had to the priests to hire masons and carpenters to start building. So the new year began with worship and rebuilding. All this was done according to the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia.

The Temple

8-10. By the second month of the year all the materials were in place. The people helped the masons and carpenters, and the priests supervised the work to make sure it was done right. When the foundation of the Temple was laid, the priests put on their robes, the Levites took their trumpets, and all the people praised the Lord.

11. They sang, "The Lord is good. His love for Israel lasts forever." Everyone sang from their hearts and praised the Lord because the foundation and cornerstone of the Temple was now in place.

12-13. But the older priests, Levites, and leaders remembered the glories of the first Temple. They cried so loud that you couldn't tell the crying from the sounds of praise.

Opposition

4 When the people in the neighboring areas heard what was happening, they asked, "Why don't you let us help you rebuild the

Temple? We worship the same God you do, and we've been offering sacrifices to Him too. We know He's the God of this country."

3. Zerubbabel, the governor, replied, "We would rather not have you help us, because you accept God only as a local god and not the God of heaven and earth. So we would rather rebuild the Temple ourselves."

4-6. Then those same people threatened to stop the building of the Temple. They even bribed the local Persian officials to do what they could to stop it. They kept this up all through the kingship of Cyrus and Darius. During the reign of the next king they even accused the Hebrews of being disloyal to the government.

7-8. Then they wrote a letter to the new king complaining about the Hebrews rebuilding Jerusalem. The letter read:

9-12. "From the officer of Samaria and all the judges and officials to the king's royal secretary. We were sent by previous kings to live here and take charge of these territories. So we want the king to know that the Hebrews are rebuilding Jerusalem. Parts of the wall are already up. There will be no end of trouble because of it."

13-14. The letter went on to say, "The king should know that once the city is rebuilt, the people will stop paying taxes. This will hurt the government. Since we are responsible to uphold the honor of Persia, we are sending this letter to let Your Majesty know what's happening."

15-16. "We suggest that the king read the history of this city to see how rebellious it has been. That's why Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it and took the people captive. If the Hebrews are allowed to rebuild this

city, Persia will no longer be in full control of these territories."

17-19. The king wrote back, "To the officer in charge of Samaria and his officials. The letter you sent was read to me, and I ordered an investigation into the history of Jerusalem. What you said is true. This city has been very rebellious. Thank you for your loyalty."

20-22. "Yes, when the Hebrews got strong they paid taxes to their own government. So we need to make sure they don't become strong again. Therefore, I want you to order them to stop rebuilding the city. Do this at once. My authority is not to be questioned, and the taxes are not to be reduced."

23. As soon as the officer got the letter, he took his troops, hurried to Jerusalem, and forced the people to stop rebuilding the city.

24. These are the things that those in charge of the territories did to stop the rebuilding of the Temple and the city. So the building didn't start again until Darius became king.

Rebuilding Begins Again

5 It was during those difficult years of rebuilding that two prophets began to speak to the people. They urged them to keep rebuilding the Temple as Cyrus, king of Persia, had told them to do. So Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, organized work crews and began building again. Even the two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, helped with the work.

3-4. That's when the new governor of the territories and his officials came to see what was happening. He asked, "Who authorized you to start building again?" Then he asked for a list of all those working on the Temple.

5. But God answered the people's prayers, and the governor let them

continue building until he got a reply to his letter from Darius, the new king of Persia.

6-9. This is what the governor wrote to the king: "To King Darius, greetings. Your Majesty should know that the Hebrews are rebuilding the Temple and the city of the great God of heaven, as they call Him. They already have large stones in place and are putting up the walls."

10-16. "We asked them who authorized them to do this, and they told us that they were just rebuilding what was there before. The king of Babylon had come and destroyed the Temple and taken them captive. Seventy years later Cyrus, king of Persia, told them to go back home and rebuild the Temple. So that's what they were doing."

17. "If it pleases the king, let someone look into the royal records to see if this is true and to let us know what to do."

A Letter From the King

6 So Darius, king of Persia, ordered a search of the royal records. They found a scroll that said, "In the first year of Cyrus, the king ordered the Temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt and sacrifices made to the God of heaven. The Temple entrance should be 100 feet high and 100 feet wide."

4-5. "All expenses should be paid out of the royal treasury. Also all the gold and silver items that Nebuchadnezzar took from the Temple should be returned."

6-8. Then King Darius sent this letter: "To the governor of the territories and all his officials. Don't stop the people from rebuilding the Temple. Also, pay their workmen from the royal treasury so that the work can go ahead as quickly as possible."

9-10. "In addition, supply them with all the animals, wheat, and olive oil

that they need for sacrifices. This should be done to please the God of heaven so that their prayers for me and my sons will be answered.

11-12. "Furthermore, I order that anyone who disobeys my command should be killed and his house demolished. May the God of heaven who chose Jerusalem as His city destroy any king or people who want to change my order or destroy the Temple. I, Darius, have spoken. Let my command be carried out."

The Temple Completed

13-15. Then the governor of the territories and his officials did what King Darius said. The people continued building the Temple with the encouragement of the two prophets. The Temple was finished in the sixth year of King Darius.

16-18. When the Temple was dedicated, the priests and Levites offered many sacrifices to the Lord in thanksgiving for what He had done. Then they organized the priests and Levites into groups to serve in the Temple according to the laws of Moses.

19-21. On the fourteenth day of the first month, the people celebrated the Passover, the first time since coming back home. The priests and Levites helped with the sacrifices, and the Passover meal was eaten not only by the exiles but by those who had not been taken to Babylon.

22. The people also kept the week-long Festival of Bread, thanking the Lord for what He had done for them through Darius, king of Persia.

Ezra Arrives

7 Almost sixty years after the first exiles came back, Ezra, a descendant of Aaron, asked the new king of Persia for permission to take back

another group of exiles. The Lord answered Ezra's prayer, and the king gave him everything that he asked for.

7-11. Those who were ready to go back included priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers, and Temple workers. They left for Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes and arrived five months later. Ezra was their leader, and this is the letter the king gave him:

12-13. "Artaxerxes, king of Persia, to Ezra, the contact person for the king to learn about the affairs of the Hebrew people. I decree that all those who want to go back home with Ezra, the priest, are free to go and rebuild Jerusalem.

14-15. "I and my advisers will let you go back to Jerusalem to see whether or not the word of your God is being carried out. You may have silver and gold from the royal treasury, which we are giving to your God, whose Temple is in Jerusalem.

16-18. "Take our gifts along with the silver and gold you collect from others and from your own people as offerings to your God. You may use this money to buy the animals and grain that you need to offer sacrifices. Then you can use the rest of it to buy whatever else you need that's in harmony with the law of your God.

19-20. "Also take with you any items you need for conducting services in the Temple. Anything else that you think you might need you may take from the royal treasury.

21-22. "I also decree that the royal treasurers around Jerusalem provide Ezra with whatever he needs. The limit is 7,500 pounds of silver, 600 bushels of wheat, and 600 gallons of olive oil and grape juice.

23-24. "They should provide these things for the God of heaven, to make

sure that He is not angry with me or my sons. And the priests, Levites, and others who work at the Temple are not to be taxed.

25-26. "You, Ezra, you are to set up a firm judicial system based on the wisdom of your God and appoint judges to govern your people. And you are to teach the people the laws of your God. Whoever does not obey will be punished by either death, exile, losing his property, or imprisonment."

27. Ezra said to the king, "Praise be to the God of heaven, who made the king willing to honor His Temple with such great gifts."

28. Because God gave me favor with the king and his advisers, I took courage and gathered almost 2,000 more families to return with me to Jerusalem.

Returning to Jerusalem

8 Then I made a list of all the heads of families who were ready to go back to Jerusalem with me. For three days we camped by the river before we left for home. As I looked over the list I found the names of priests, but no Levites.

16-20. So I sent some men to see if they could find some Levites and Temple workers willing to come along. They came back with more than 250 Levites and Temple workers.

21-23. Before we left, we prayed for a safe trip and asked God to protect us and our children over the hundreds of miles we had to walk. After telling the king about our powerful God, I couldn't ask him for a guard to protect us. We knew that God would answer our prayers.

24-27. Then with the help of the some of the priests, I weighed out the gifts that the king and others had given us. We had more than twenty-five tons of silver, 100 silver utensils,

more than three tons of gold, and twenty golden bowls, plus two items of polished bronze.

28-30. I said to the priests, "These offerings are special. They are set apart for the Lord, just as you are. Guard these offerings with your life. When we get to Jerusalem, we'll give them to the leading priests." So they took charge of these offerings and saw to it that they got to Jerusalem.

31-34. We left on the twelfth day of the first month, and the Lord protected us all the way. After traveling hundreds of miles, we finally got to Jerusalem. We rested for three days before going to the Temple. Then we gave the leading priests and officials the offerings we had. After counting and weighing everything, we found that it was all there.

35. Then the people brought to the Lord their own thank offerings for a safe journey. We also sacrificed twelve young bulls, one for each tribe, plus rams, lambs, and goats as sin offerings.

36. Next we delivered the letter of the king to the Persian officials in charge of the territories around Jerusalem. And they gave us what we needed for the Temple as specified by the king.

Marriage Problems

9 Later some of the leaders came to me and said, "Our people have taken on some of the evil ways of the Canaanites and other neighboring nations. It started when they married pagan women and brought them to live in Israel. Some of our priests, Levites, and officials have done the same thing."

3-4. When I heard this, I tore my robe in grief and sat down in shock. Those who were faithful to God stood by me because they too were hurt and

alarmed over what the previous exiles had done. I sat there in pain as I identified myself with their sins.

5-6. At the time of the evening worship, I got up, tore my robe again, and made my way to the Temple. I fell on my knees and said, "O God, I'm ashamed to come to You to speak of my people. What have we done? We are over our heads in sin. Our guilt reaches up to the sky.

7. "From the days of our ancestors until now we have fallen into evil. Our guilt is beyond words. Because of our sins we were taken captive and humiliated. Now we're back home, and we're committing the same sins.

8-9. "Lord, You have been so good to us. You've brought us back home. We can worship at Your Temple again. You've given us hope and a new outlook on life by setting us free. You gave us grace in the sight of the Persian kings who let us come back and rebuild your Temple and city.

10-12. "But now all this has happened. What can we say? Through our prophets You said, 'The people around you have polluted the land with evil practices. Therefore, do not let your sons marry their daughters, or give your daughters to their sons. Don't make a friendship treaty with them if you and your children want to stay strong and be happy.'

13. "The reason we were taken captive was because of our sins. Our guilt is great. Yet You have been so kind to us and have not let us be destroyed. You have watched over us all the years we were in captivity, and have brought us safely home.

14-15. "Should we again disobey You and do these wicked things? We have. You would be justified in letting us be totally destroyed. O Lord, how righteous and gracious You are. We come

to You with our guilt, confessing our sins. Yet we know we have no right of ourselves to come into Your presence."

Confession

10 While I was praying in the Temple, confessing our sins, a large number of people came to me and also began to pray. Then one of the leaders said to me, "We have gone against the Lord's instructions and have married pagan women. But there is still hope for us through the God who loves us.

3-4. "We have to renew our stand for the Lord and send these heathen women back home to their own people. Whatever you and the other leaders tell us to do, we will do. We want to obey the Lord. But it's your responsibility to lead our people to do the right thing, and we'll support you. So take courage and do it."

5. Then I followed his suggestion and took over the leadership of the people. The first thing I did was ask the priests and Levites to take an oath upholding what the Lord had told us to do.

6. Then I left the Temple and spent the night with one of the priests. I continued to fast and pray. I ate and drank nothing and confessed the sins of my people, especially those committed by the exiles.

7-8. The next day we issued a proclamation throughout the land for all the exiles to come to Jerusalem. It read: "Anyone who fails to show up in three days will have his property taken away and will be expelled from Israel."

9. By the end of three days all the men of Judah had come to Jerusalem and stood in front of the Temple. It was a cold and windy day, with periods of drizzling rain. The men shook from the cold and were fearful of what might happen.

10-11. Then I stood up and said, "Men of Israel, you have been unfaithful to the Lord. You have married pagan women and brought guilt on all of us. But the Lord has been gracious. Confess your sins and then do what He has told us to do. Change your ways and send your heathen wives with their children back home to their own people."

12-14. With one voice the men said, "You are right! We will do it!" Then their leader said, "We're ready to obey, but there are too many such families to do this in one or two days. It's hard to camp out here in the rain. Let the officials in each town take care of the problem."

15-17. Only a few opposed the idea. So I appointed men to see that the plan was carried out. I read off their names and set a time for the officials in each town and village to have the men come to them, pledge to obey the Lord, and send their heathen wives back home. It took three months to do it, but it was done.

18-44. Then the officials gave me a list of the men who had married heathen wives, and carried out the plan. The list included priests, Levites, and Temple workers. All these men had married heathen women, and some had even had children by them. Yet they all agreed to send them back home to their own people.

Nehemiah

INTRODUCTION: *This book was written by Nehemiah. He worked for the king of Persia, who appointed him governor of Judah in 444 B.C. We learn how God used Nehemiah to help the people rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The enemies of the Jews tried to stop them. But Nehemiah was very courageous and kept on doing God's work until the walls were finished. He was governor for twelve years. Later he also helped the people know how to have good families and live more fully for God.*

Concern About Jerusalem

1 This is what the Lord helped me do for Jerusalem. In the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, I was in his palace. He often asked my advice and accepted my counsel. It had been about thirteen years since Ezra had taken the last group of exiles home.

2-3. One day my brother Hanani and some other men came from Jerusalem. I asked how things were, and they told me about all the problems the people were having. Their pagan neighbors had destroyed parts of the new wall and had set the gates on fire. A large part of the city was still in ruins.

4-5. When I heard this, I sat down and cried. For days I fasted and prayed. I said, "O Lord, You are the God of heaven and earth. We stand in awe of Your power. You are faithful to Your people and keep the promises You make to those who love You."

6-7. "Please listen to Me, Lord. I'm praying for our people back home. I've prayed for days, and my heart is heavy. Our ancestors have sinned, and so have we. We have not kept Your commandments."

8-10. "You warned us what would happen. You told us that we would be taken captive and scattered every-

where. But You promised that if we would keep Your commandments, You would take us back home. O God, I'm worried about the exiles who went back only to face more problems.

11. "Please listen to my prayer and the prayers of all Your people. If the king would let me go home, and if he would supply the building materials, I would be willing to go back and take on the responsibility of rebuilding Jerusalem. Please help me as I talk to him."

Nehemiah Talks to the King

2 For four whole months I tried to hide the sadness of my heart. Then one day the king noticed. He asked, "Why are you so sad? What's bothering you?"

3. I was scared, because the king doesn't want anyone around him who's sad. My eyes filled with tears, and I answered, "May the king live forever. How can I be happy when the city of my ancestors lies in ruins? Parts of the new wall have been torn down and the gates set on fire."

4-6. The king asked, "What can I do to help?" I quickly said a prayer and answered, "If it pleases the king, let me be relieved of my duties and go back to rebuild the city." "How long will that take?" he asked. I replied, "It

will probably take a couple of years." To my surprise, the king granted my request.

7-8. When I saw that my prayers were being answered, I got up courage and asked, "If it pleases the king, may I have your permission in writing so that I can show it to the governor of the territories back there? A letter to the man in charge of the forests would also help, because I will need some building supplies." To my surprise, he agreed to that, too.

9. He even ordered a royal guard of horsemen to go along to protect me. When we got to the territories, I gave the governor the king's letter. He and his officials read the letter and were very kind to us.

10. Later when Sanballat, the officer in charge of Samaria, and the officials from other territories heard that a Jew had been sent from Persia to govern Judah and rebuild Jerusalem, they were very upset.

Nehemiah Inspects Jerusalem

11-13. Then I hurried on to Jerusalem. For three days I told no one why I was there, except for a few trusted friends. One night we quietly went around the whole city inspecting the walls, especially the gates.

14-16. There was so much rubble in one place that even the donkey couldn't make it. We had to go down into the valley and look at that part of the wall from there. Then we retraced our steps and came back home. The city fathers didn't know what we had done, and I didn't tell them, nor did I tell any of the priests or other officials.

17. The next day I called a meeting and told them that the king had appointed me as governor of Judah, with authority to rebuild the city. I said, "Just look at this place! After all these years the

city is still in ruins. It's a disgrace to our ancestors and to our heritage as God's people. We need to do something about this. Come, let's build."

18. Then I told them how God had answered my prayer when I talked to the king. I also showed them the letter. When they read it, they shouted for joy and exclaimed, "Yes! Let's go ahead and build!" So we began building with enthusiasm.

19. When Sanballat, the officer in charge of Samaria, and his friends heard about the meeting, they came to make fun of us. They asked, "What do you people think you're doing? Are you going to rebel against Persia and declare your independence?"

20. I answered, "No, but the God of heaven will bless us and help us rebuild our city. Just because you're descendants of Lot and Esau, that doesn't give you the right to say what should go on here."

Rebuilding the Wall

3 When we began rebuilding the wall, we divided the responsibility and gave each group a different section. The high priest and his group took one section, the men from Jericho another, and so on. But when the men from Tekoa took a section, their leaders refused to help.

6-21. One of the sections was assigned to the men from Gibeon, and the city manager and his daughters also took a section. Nehemiah from one of the outlying districts and his men worked a section, and the Levites rebuilt the section after that.

22-32. The priests also helped. The Temple workers took a section, and when the men from Tekoa finished their section they took another one. A second group of priests repaired the section after that, and the business-

men and merchants built the last section of the wall.

Opposition

4 When Sanballat heard that we were actually building the wall, he came with his friend Tobiah and some troops to take a look, and got very angry.

2. He started making fun of us right in front of them and said, "What do these Hebrews think they're doing? Do they think they can finish the wall in one night before we come back and attack? Besides, where will they get all the large stones they need to finish the wall? They'll never do it."

3. Then Tobiah also made fun of us, saying, "The only kind of wall they know how to build is one a fox could knock over."

4-5. When I heard that, I silently prayed, "O God, listen to how these men hate us. Maybe they should experience what it's like to be taken captive and then come home to a city full of ruins. Lord, don't overlook what these men are doing to us. They're discouraging our people with their insults."

6-9. After Sanballat and Tobiah went back, we continued to build the wall. Soon it was halfway up. The people were working very hard. When Sanballat and his friends heard that, they were furious. So they decided to come and pick a fight and then blame us for starting it. But we prayed and posted guards on the wall day and night to watch for them.

10-11. Then the people came to me and said, "Our energy is giving out. There's so much rubble to be carried away. We can't possibly finish the wall. And our enemies are saying, 'Before these people know what's happening we'll come and kill every

one of them. That will stop the building of the wall once and for all.'"

12-13. When our people who lived near the border heard that, they were really scared. They warned us ten times that our enemies would attack us. So I armed our men with swords and spears and stationed them where the wall wasn't finished.

14. After doing that, I could tell that the people were still worried. I said to them, "Our God is powerful, and He's on our side. So don't be afraid. Let's be ready to fight and defend our country. He will help us."

15-16. When our enemies found out that we had heard about their plans, they gave up their idea and decided to leave us alone. This was good news, but we didn't trust them. So we continued to work and watch. Half the men worked, and the other half stood guard.

17-20. Some brought us building materials in one hand while holding a sword in the other hand. Others strapped swords to their sides for ready use. The man with the ram's horn stayed close to me, ready to warn the people if an attack came. I had said to them, "When you hear the ram's horn, come running. Don't be afraid. God will fight for us."

21-22. So in this state of alert we continued building. From sunrise to sunset half the men stood guard while the other men worked. The next day they switched. Also I told the people not to go back to their villages, but to stay in the city to help stand guard at night.

23. I wore the same clothes day and night, as did my brother, my servants, and my personal guards. We all slept with our clothes on. And even when we washed, we had our swords within reach.

Problems

5 As time went on, some of our people started complaining about the more wealthy Jews. They said, "We have large families and don't have enough to eat." Others said, "We've had to borrow money on our houses and farms to buy food at very high prices."

4-5. Still others said, "We had to borrow money from our rich brothers at high interest to pay our taxes to the Persian government. Are we not the same people? Aren't our children as precious as theirs? Yet we feel totally at their mercy. We have to sell our sons and daughters as servants because we already sold our fields and vineyards just to stay alive."

6-7. As I listened to their complaints I knew they were right. I decided to do something. So I called a meeting of the officials and the rich men of the city and said, "You men are taking advantage of your own brothers. That's not right!"

8-9. After that I called a public meeting and said to the people, "We have bought back every son and daughter who was sold as a servant to our non-Jewish neighbors. Now you're buying and selling them to each other! This has got to stop! We need to show our love for God by doing what's right. Why should our enemies laugh at us?"

10-11. "I have lent money and given food to our people and so have my brothers and those who work for me. The best way to show our love for each other is to do what I have done. We need to cancel whatever money they still owe us and give back the interest we have charged them."

12. They said, "We will do it! We will cancel whatever they still owe us!" Then I asked the priests to take an

oath in front of the people as an example of what to do.

13. Also I emptied my pockets in front of the people and said, "This is the way God will empty your pockets if you don't keep your promise. He will take away everything you have." They said, "So be it!" And they all kept their promise.

Nehemiah Helps

14. I became governor in the twentieth year of the king of Persia and served for twelve years. All that time my brothers and I and those who worked for me never asked for any part of the taxes for ourselves.

15-16. That's what the governors before me had done. They even increased the taxes so that they could get a bigger share and spend it on more and more banquets. I had too much respect for my God to do that. My servants and I worked on the wall even without pay.

17-18. In addition, every day I fed 150 city officials at my table free of charge. This took a lot of food. And I asked for nothing that the governor usually gets to run his office, because the people were already sacrificing to build the wall.

19. "O God, remember me for all that I'm doing to help our people."

Plots Against Nehemiah

6 When Sanballat heard that we were continuing to build the wall and that we had filled in the gaps, he sent me a message asking me to come and meet him in one of the villages. I knew what he had in mind. So I gave him this answer: "I am doing an important work. I can't come and let the project go unsupervised, or it will stop."

4-5. Four times he invited me, and four

times I gave him the same answer. The fifth time he sent an open letter intending that it be made public.

6. It said, "Someone told me that you and your people are planning to revolt against the Persian government and declare your independence. Rumor also has it that you want to be the king of this new country.

7. "Some say that you've already appointed prophets to proclaim you king when the right time comes. I think we need to get together and talk before word about this gets back to the king of Persia."

8-9. I sent back this message: "Nothing that you say is true. You made the whole thing up, and you know it. I'm not coming." I knew Sanballat was just trying to keep us from finishing the wall. I prayed, "O God, make me strong for you."

10. After this I went to Shemaiah, in whom I had some confidence. He asked to see me because he was scared. He suggested that the two of us hide in the Temple and lock the doors, because there was a plot to kill me.

11. I said, "Why should I go and hide? What would the people think? If I don't have faith in God, why should they? I refuse to go." He tried to tell me that this was a message from the Lord.

12-13. But as I thought about it, I knew that Shemaiah could not be a prophet of the Lord, as he claimed to be. I also wondered whether Saballat had paid him to say this. He was trying to scare me into saving myself and that way destroy the people's confidence in me and stop the project.

14. Then I prayed, "O God, don't forget what Sanballat and Tobiah are doing to me. And don't forget what these self-appointed prophets like Shemaiah are doing to frighten me, especially Noadiah, the false prophetess."

The Wall Completed

15-16. So we pushed ahead and completed the wall in fifty-two days. It took a lot of hard work. At the same time we guarded the city against attack. When our enemies heard that the wall was done, they knew that God was with us, and they lost their courage to attack.

17-18. Later I learned that all this time some of the Jewish leaders had been sending letters to Sanballat and his friend Tobiah, telling them what was going on. I also learned that Tobiah was related to some of the Jewish families by marriage.

19. That's why they were always telling me what a good man Tobiah was and telling him how I felt about him and Sanballat. And that's why these two were against me—because they thought they had the backing of the people.

Celebration

7 When the wall was finished and the gates were set in place, we appointed gatekeepers. We also appointed Temple guards, formed a choir, and organized the priests and Levites into service groups. I put two men in charge of the city, one to manage it and the other to protect it. Both were honest men who loved the Lord more than most men I knew.

3. I said to them, "Be sure to close the city gates at night and don't open them until sunrise. The guards should stay on duty and make sure the gates are closed. Also set up neighborhood watches throughout the city. Some people should guard the neighborhood, and others should keep a close watch around their houses."

4-7. The city was considered large for its day, but few people lived there, because it was still in ruins. So God

impressed me to call the leaders and the people together and register them by families, to see who they were and where they lived. Also I found a list of the families who years before had come back from Babylon with Zerubbabel.

8-60. More than 25,000 men and more than 4,000 priests had come back with their families. There were seventy-four Levites, 148 musicians, 138 gatekeepers, and almost 400 Temple workers.

61-65. More than 600 men couldn't prove their Jewish ancestry. There were also some priests who couldn't prove their ancestry. Zerubbabel would not let them serve at the Temple until he could get an answer from God about it.

66-67. More than 42,000 exiles had returned under Zerubbabel and registered their families. This did not include more than 7,000 male and female servants or more than 200 male and female singers.

68-69. These exiles had brought back with them more than 700 horses, more than 200 mules, more than 400 camels, and almost 7,000 donkeys.

70-72. Many of these people gave liberally toward rebuilding the wall. Zerubbabel gave twenty pounds of gold, fifty golden bowls for the Temple, and thirty robes for the priests. The people gave more than 300 pounds of gold, 2,500 pounds of silver, and sixty-seven robes for the priests.

73. All these people settled in the towns and villages of Judah to which they belonged.

Ezra Reads the Law

8 Then the people came to celebrate the new civil year, which began by blowing the trumpets. A few days later the Day of Atonement and the Festival of Shelters began. That's when the people asked Ezra to

read the laws of God to them—the ones that God had given to Moses.

2-6. The first day Ezra, who was now old, read the laws of God to the people from morning until noon. The people really listened. He stood on a platform, and a number of priests were with him. As he opened the book he praised the Lord, and the people said, "Amen! Amen!" Then they all knelt and worshiped the Lord.

7-8. After Ezra finished, the Levites went among the people to help them understand what had been read, because many of them had forgotten a lot of their Hebrew. They explained things clearly and answered their questions.

9. When the people understood what God had said, they began to cry because of their sins. Then Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites told the people that this was a day for joy and celebration, not a day for crying.

10. Nehemiah said, "Let's celebrate finishing the work, that God gave us to do. Share your food with those who have little or nothing. Don't be sad. The Lord loves you. The joy of the Lord is your strength."

11-12. So the Levites went among the people helping those who were still in tears and telling them to rejoice in the Lord. Then the people who lived nearby went home and invited those who didn't have anything to come and eat with them. Everybody was happy and celebrated what the Lord had done for them.

13-14. The next day the heads of families, the priests, and the Levites met with Ezra to learn more about the laws that God had given to Moses. Then they understood why the Day of Atonement and the Festival of Shelters should be kept.

15. They went to all the towns and villages telling the people what to do.

They told them to get some branches from different trees and make little shelters for themselves. They should live in them for one week. This would help them remember how the Lord had brought them out of Egypt and lived with them all through the wilderness.

16-17. So that's what the people did. They set up these shelters everywhere, in their yards, on their flat roofs, in the city square, and in the Temple courtyard. They hadn't done it like this since the days of Joshua. Everyone was very happy.

18. Every day Ezra read something to them from the laws of God. And at the end of that week they had a special meeting celebrating what the Lord had done for them.

The People Repent

9 Two days later the people came back wearing mourning clothes and had ashes sprinkled on their heads. They confessed their sins and admitted that their ancestors had sinned too. They stood there for three hours as they listened to Ezra read the laws of God. After he finished, they stayed another three hours confessing their sins.

4-5. After the men on the platform prayed and confessed their sins and the sins of the people, Joshua, the high priest, told them that their sins were forgiven. He said to stand and praise the Lord. His name is to be praised forever.

6. Then he prayed, "You alone, O Lord, are the Lord of heaven and earth. You created the planets and stars. You made the oceans. Everything lives because of You. The whole universe worships You.

7-8. "You are the one who called Abraham to come and follow You. You made a covenant with him and prom-

ised to give him the land of Canaan. You kept Your promise because You always keep Your Word.

9-12. "You saw our people suffer in Egypt and heard their cry for help. You worked miracles and opened the Red Sea for them to walk across on dry ground. Then the waters closed, and the king and his men drowned. During the day You led Your people with a pillar of cloud, and at night You watched over them with a pillar of fire.

13-15. "You spoke to them from Mount Sinai and gave them good laws. You wrote the Ten Commandments with Your own finger and gave them laws to govern their country. When they were hungry You gave them manna, and when they were thirsty You gave them water from the rock. You told them to go in and possess the land.

16-17. "But our ancestors were stubborn. They didn't listen to You. They forgot everything You had done for them. They even wanted to go back to Egypt. But You forgave them. You were gracious and kind, slow to discipline, and full of compassion.

18-20. "You still didn't forsake them, even after they had made a golden calf and worshiped it. Your presence in the pillar of cloud and in the pillar of fire never left them. The Holy Spirit taught them to understand Your Word and gave them courage.

21-25. "For forty years you gave them whatever they needed. Their clothes never wore out. They never got sick, and they never had swollen feet from all that walking. They defeated kings. You went ahead of them, and they took possession of the land. They found fertile soil, wells, olive trees, vineyards, and houses filled with wealth.

26-27. "Then they became disobedient and rebelled. They turned their backs on Your commandments. They

killed Your prophets. They insulted You again and again. So You let their enemies come and oppress them. Then they cried to You for help, and You delivered them.

28-29. "As soon as they had peace, they sinned again. Then their enemies came and oppressed them, and You delivered them. This happened again and again. Each time You warned them to be good, but they wouldn't listen. They became more and more stubborn.

30-31. "The Holy Spirit spoke to them through the prophets, but they didn't listen to them, either. So You let their enemies come and take them to Babylon. Even there You didn't abandon them. Because of Your compassion and kindness You didn't let them be destroyed. You are merciful and patient.

32-33. "Our God is great and strong and good. Lord, You didn't overlook our suffering. You didn't forget the promise that You made. Over the years our kings, prophets, and people have suffered much. Yet through it all You have been faithful and just, even though we rebelled against You many times.

34-35. "Our kings, leaders, priests, and people haven't always kept Your law. Even when they had their own country, and there was peace and prosperity, they neither served You nor stopped their wickedness.

36-37. "So now we are back home from exile and in our own land again. It's a good land. But we are like slaves. Much of our harvests go for taxes to the kings of Persia. They control our lives and our cattle. We live in constant fear and distress.

38. "We confess our sins and promise to listen to You. We realize that it's not good to disobey You. Our leaders

and priests are writing down our promise and putting their seal on it."

The Covenant Renewed

10 The first to seal the people's promise and sign it was Governor Nehemiah. Then the leaders and priests who were up front followed. The rest of the people, priests, Levites, Temple guards, musicians, and workers, together with their wives and children, all took an oath to obey the Lord. They would rather live under a curse than not obey.

30-31. Their commitment read as follows: "We promise not to let our sons and daughters marry heathen people. We promise not to buy or sell on the Sabbath. We promise to let the land rest every seventh year. We promise to cancel all remaining debts that our brothers owe us.

32-35. "We promise to give offerings to support the Temple. We promise to keep Your festivals. We promise to provide the priests with sacrifices or anything else they need to carry on Your worship. We promise to bring a sample of the first harvest to You as a thank offering.

36-37. "We promise to bring our newborn children to the Temple for dedication. We promise to give all the firstborn animals to You and to bring You a sample of the new flour, grape juice, and olive oil for the year. We promise to give the Levites an accurate tithe of all our increase.

38-39. "We promise to send a priest with each group of Levites collecting the tithe to see that one tenth of it goes into a reserve fund for emergency use. As Levites and priests we promise that all the tithe will be used for the Temple and for those who work there."

Jerusalem Needs People

11 The next question that had to be settled was who besides the leaders should live in Jerusalem. It was decided that one family out of every ten should move there. They were to be chosen by lots. In addition, some families volunteered, and the people thanked them for it.

3-36. Many who had come back from Babylon and settled in their own towns and villages decided to move to Jerusalem. Some families were from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin and some from the priests, Levites, Temple guards, and musicians. Others decided to move to nearby towns and villages, and some stayed where they were.

Priests and Levites

12 Also a list was made of the priests and Levites who had come back from Babylon with Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest. When Joshua died, his son became high priest, and then his son, and so on.

22-23. A record has been kept of the all the Levites and priests who served under the various high priests. This list was first made when Darius was king of Persia, and then kept up all through the years, until it was included in the books of Chronicles.

24-26. The Levites and priests were assigned their duties. The singers followed the rules that King David had written down. And the Temple guards were put in charge of the storerooms and the gates. This all took place when Nehemiah was governor and Ezra was in charge of the law of God.

The Wall Is Dedicated

27-29. When the wall of Jerusalem was finished, Levites and priests were called in from all over the country for the dedication. They came with their

cymbals and harps to provide music. Singers were also called in for the celebration. Some of them had to come a long way.

30. Before the dedication the priests and Levites went through the purification ritual, first for themselves, then for the people, and finally for the gates and the wall.

31-37. Then I divided the civil and religious leaders into two groups. A choir sang songs of thanksgiving and praise as they led each group in opposite directions along the top of the wall. The first group of leaders went to the right, led by Ezra. After that came the priests with their trumpets and the Levites with their musical instruments.

38-42. I led the second group of leaders in the opposite direction, followed by the priests and Levites. When both groups met, we entered the Temple singing praise to God. The priests played their trumpets, the choir sang, and the Levites played their cymbals and harps.

43. We celebrated the day by offering many sacrifices and rejoicing over what God had done for us. The women and children also joined in. Our shouts of joy could be heard a long way away.

44-45. After the dedication we put some responsible men in charge of the tithes and offerings. They were to collect them from the people on the farms and in the villages. The people were pleased and trusted these men. Everyone performed their services well, including the Temple guards and musicians.

46. David and Solomon had left instructions how everything should be done. And David had written songs of praise and thanksgiving for the Lord.

47. In the days of Zerubbabel, and later Nehemiah, the people gave enough offerings to also pay the Temple guards

and the musicians. This was in addition to the tithes for the Levites, who in turn gave their tithe to the priests.

Nehemiah's Temple Reforms

13 A few years later I came back, called the people together, and again had the laws of Moses read to them. It clearly said that the people from the countries of Ammon and Moab should not be allowed into the inner part of the Temple.

2-3. Their ancestors had not only refused to give our people water when they were thirsty, but had even hired Balaam to curse Israel. When our people heard this, they did what it said.

4-5. I also learned that the high priest was quite friendly with Tobiah, who was an Ammonite. He had not only let him into the Temple but had turned one of the offering storerooms into an apartment for him.

6-9. All this had happened while I was gone. I had gone back to Persia to serve the king, and later asked him permission to return to Jerusalem for a second term as governor. He granted my request, and that's when I learned about all this. I was really upset. I went in and threw Tobiah's belongings out of the apartment and ordered it cleaned.

10-12. I also learned that the Levites and musicians had gone back home because the people were not bringing their tithes and offerings. So I brought the Levites and musicians back. This restored the confidence of the people, and they brought their tithes and offerings as before.

13. Then I put a priest in charge of the storerooms and gave him an assistant. I picked these men because I knew I could trust them with the tithes and offerings.

14. "O Lord, remember me for this, and don't let what I have done for the Temple be for nothing."

Sabbath Reforms

15-16. The other thing I found out was that our people were working their farms and vineyards on the Sabbath. Others had set up fruit markets and had special sales on the Sabbath. It didn't take me long to put a stop to that. Merchants from neighboring countries had moved into Jerusalem and had set up their markets on the Sabbath too.

17-18. So I confronted the city fathers and said, "What's going on? This buying and selling is breaking the Sabbath." I reminded them that this is what our ancestors did and that's why the Lord let the Babylonians come and destroy the city. Then I said, "Now we're doing the same thing!"

19-20. So I ordered the city gates closed on the Sabbath and stationed some of my own men there to make sure that they stayed closed. Once or twice the merchants from other countries spent the night outside the city walls hoping that the gates would open Sabbath morning for business.

21. I told them that the gates would stay closed. I also told them that if they kept coming and camping outside the walls I would have them arrested. So they stopped coming on Sabbath.

22. Then I ordered the Levites to keep an eye on the small walk-in gates, to make sure no merchants came in that way. "O Lord, remember me for this, too, and be merciful to me according to Your great love."

Marriage Reforms

23-24. On top of all that, I also found out that while I was gone Jewish men had again married heathen women. And their children couldn't even speak Hebrew.

25. I called these men together and confronted them. I tried to pound

some sense into their heads, and even grabbed some of them by their beards to make my point. I had them promise that they would not let their sons and daughters marry heathen people.

26-27. I reminded them what had happened to King Solomon. At first there was no king like him. He loved God, and God blessed him. But then he married heathen women, and they led him away from God and into sin. Then I said, "Now you're doing the same thing!"

28. In fact, a grandson of the high priest had married one of the daughters of Sanballat, who had tried to

stop us from building the wall. When he refused to send his wife back home, I dismissed him from the priesthood. So he decided to go and live with his father-in-law in Samaria.

29. "O Lord, remember me for what I did to honor You. These men disgraced the priestly office and have broken the covenant You made with them."

30-31. So I purified the community and wrote out policies for the priests and Levites to follow. I also made arrangements for the people to bring their tithes, offerings, and sacrifices to the Temple at regular intervals. "O Lord, remember me for the good that I have done, because I love You."

Esther

INTRODUCTION: *We don't know for sure who wrote this book. Some think it was written by Esther's uncle, Mordecai. Events in this book took place between 486 and 470 B.C. We learn how a young Jewish girl became queen of Persia. And when an evil man named Haman tricked King Xerxes into killing all the Jews, Esther risked her life and saved her people. Esther prepared the way for Ezra and Nehemiah to do their work. We also learn that God can save His people in some very unusual ways.*

The King and Queen

1 The Persian Empire was big. It went all the way from the borders of India to the borders of Ethiopia. The capital was Susa. In the third year of his reign King Xerxes decided to have a huge banquet for all his officials, generals, and governors, and for influential people from all across the country.

4-5. One group at a time came, and the king let them see all the riches and splendor of the royal court. This went on for six months. At the end of that time, the king held a special weeklong banquet for all the people and workers in the palace.

6-9. The palace was beautifully decorated with blue, white, and purple awnings. Gold and silver couches were carefully arranged on the white marble floor. Wine was served in golden cups, and there was so much food that people couldn't eat it all. And the queen had her own banquet for the women.

10-12. On the last day of the weeklong banquet, the king invited the queen to come in and dance for his guests. She refused. This made the king mad. It embarrassed him, because it looked as if the queen had more power than he did.

13-18. When the banquet was over, the king asked his advisers what to do about the queen's refusal to obey him. One of them said, "Your Majesty, when this becomes known, women across the whole country will refuse to obey their husbands. This will cause no end of trouble."

19-20. "Let the king give a royal order that Queen Vashti may never again come into the king's presence. Then let another woman be chosen as queen. When the women across the country hear this, they'll respect their husbands and listen to them."

21-22. The king and his advisers liked the idea, so that's what he did. The order went out to all the governors in the empire. It said that every woman should respect her husband and that he should have the final say in the family.

Esther Becomes Queen

2 After the king calmed down he thought about Vashti and missed her. His advisers said, "Your Majesty, we need to hold a beauty contest and let the most beautiful girl in the whole country take Vashti's place."

3-4. "The finalists should come to the capital and let the king pick the

winner." This suggestion pleased the king. So he ordered it to be done.

5-7. In the capital there lived a Jew named Mordecai. His ancestors had been taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar years before. When the Persians had taken over, some exiles decided to stay there. Mordecai had a young cousin named Esther. Her parents had died when she was young, and he had raised her. She was very beautiful.

8-9. All young women had to take part in the contest, and Esther was one of the finalists. So she was brought to the palace and given a manager and servant girls to help her get ready for the big day.

10-11. Mordecai had told her not to tell anyone that she was Jewish and that her ancestors had been captives. Every day he would walk in front of the gate by her apartment until she or one of the servant girls came out. He wanted to know how she was doing.

12. The training and beauty treatments lasted a whole year. The first six months the focus was on physical training and exercise, and the last six months were on beauty and how to behave as queen.

13-16. When the big day came, each of the finalists had to see the king individually. She could wear whatever she chose and take with her anything she wanted. When it was Esther's turn, she let her manager decide what she should wear. But she didn't take anything along to impress the king.

17-18. When the king saw Esther, he was immediately attracted to her and chose her to be the new queen. Then he held a special banquet for her and proclaimed a holiday throughout the empire. He also gave out many gifts in honor of his new queen.

19-20. After the celebrations were over, Esther told the king about

Mordecai's abilities, and the king hired him. But Esther told no one about her family background, just as he had suggested.

21-23. One day Mordecai overheard two men talking about killing the king. He told Esther about it, and she told the king. The king ordered an investigation, and the plot was uncovered. Then the two men were arrested and executed. All this was written in the royal records.

A Plot Against the Jews

3 Later King Xerxes decided to honor a man named Haman and make him prime minister. This man was a descendant of one of the enemy kings whom Saul had defeated and killed.

2-3. At Haman's inauguration the king ordered all his officials to bow to Haman every time he passed through the gate. Everybody except Mordecai did. The other officials got worried, because that could get all of them in trouble.

4. Day after day Mordecai refused to bow down. Finally he told his fellow officials that he was a Jew and that Haman's people had slaughtered his Jewish ancestors. So the officials asked Haman if he would make an exception in this case.

5-6. When Haman heard that Mordecai was not bowing to him, he became furious. And when he learned that Mordecai was a Jew, he decided to kill all Jews in the whole country.

7-8. Then Haman cast lots to see which day was best to carry out his plan. The lot fell on the thirteenth of the last month of the year. So he went to see the king and told him that there was a group of people scattered throughout the empire who didn't keep the law. They followed their own

customs and ought to be killed for their disloyalty, he told the king.

9-11. Haman suggested that the king write an order to have them killed and then take their property. That would put tons of money into the nation's treasury. The king listened and agreed. Then he gave Haman his ring and told him to write up the order and stamp it with his ring. He also told Haman that all the money that came in would be his to manage.

12. So on the thirteenth day of the first month of the year, Haman called in his secretaries and dictated the royal order. He told them to translate it into every language in the empire. When they finished, he stamped each copy with the royal ring. Then he gave the ring back to the king.

13. The royal messengers took the king's order to every part of the empire. It said that on the thirteenth day of the last month of the year, every Jewish family—men, women, and children—should be killed because of their disloyalty to the country. Their property should be sold and the money put in the royal treasury.

14-15. The order was read publicly and then posted to make sure everyone knew when it was to be carried out. The first city where the order was read and posted was the capital. The king and Haman congratulated each other, but the people were confused, because that didn't sound like their king.

Mordecai Tells Esther

4 When Mordecai heard the order read and learned that it was written by Haman, he tore his robe in grief. He sprinkled ashes on his head and walked through the streets crying. When he got to the royal gate to go to work, they wouldn't let him in,

because no one looking like that was allowed in.

3. As the days went by, there was mourning throughout the country. The Jews tore their robes, put ashes on their heads, and prayed to God for help.

4. When the servants told Esther that Mordecai was sitting in the city square crying, she was worried. She sent him a new robe and told him to put it on and stop crying. That way he could go through the gate and come to work. But he refused.

5-8. Then Esther asked one of her servants to go and talk to Mordecai to find out what the problem was. Mordecai told him about the king's order and gave him a copy. He told the servant to show it to Esther and tell her to go see the king and ask for mercy.

9-11. The servant told Esther everything that Mordecai had said and gave her a copy of the king's order. After reading it, she told the servant to go and remind Mordecai that no one is allowed to see the king uninvited. Unexpected visitors are put to death unless the king holds out his scepter to them.

12-13. Mordecai sent this message back: "Don't think that just because you're living in the palace, you'll escape this decree. Haman knows that we're related."

14. "If you go in to see the king, there's a chance you might be able to save us. But if you don't, and God saves us some other way, you'll forever be a disgrace to your people. Who knows—maybe you were chosen to be queen for such a time as this."

15-16. When Esther heard that, she decided to go and see the king, no matter what. She sent this message to Mordecai: "Tell all the Jews in the city to pray for me. Get them to fast and

pray for three days and nights. I and my servants will do the same. Then I'll go in to see the king, and if I perish, I perish."

17. Then Mordecai went throughout the city and did what Esther had told him to do.

Esther's Banquet

5 On the third day of fasting and praying, Esther put on her royal robes and went to see the king. He was sitting on his throne ready to do the country's business.

2. When the doors opened, he saw Esther standing there waiting to see him. He held out his royal scepter as a sign for her to come in. She came in, touched his scepter, and bowed in his presence.

3-4. The king said, "What is so urgent that you risked your life to come and see me? You may have anything you want, up to half the kingdom. So what can I do for you?" Esther said, "Your Majesty, I would like you and Haman to come to a special banquet that I am preparing for you."

5-8. So the king sent word to Haman, and they attended the queen's banquet. As they were eating, the king said to Esther, "Tell me what it is that I can do for you." She said, "If you come again tomorrow, I will tell you."

Haman's Plot

9. That afternoon Haman left for home feeling great. He saw Mordecai sitting in the city square by the palace gate, and Mordecai would not get up and bow to him. This made Haman really mad.

10-11. But he controlled himself and said nothing. When he got home, he asked a few of his close friends to come and see him. When they got there, he told them how rich he was

since becoming prime minister, how proud he was of his ten sons, and how pleased the king was with him.

12-13. He also told them about the banquet that he had had with the king and queen earlier that day, and that she had invited him to join them again tomorrow. Then he said, "But one thing really bothers me. There's this Jew, Mordecai, who never bows when I come by. He just sits there and shows absolutely no respect for my authority."

14. Haman's wife and friends listened and said, "You should build a framework next to your house on which to hang him. But first you need to see the king and ask permission to have this Jew arrested and executed for disobeying the king's order to bow to you." Haman liked their idea.

Mordecai Is Honored

6 That night the king couldn't sleep. He called his scribe and asked him to read the history of his reign. When the scribe read that Mordecai had saved the king's life by uncovering a plot against him, the king asked, "What have we done to honor this man?" The scribe answered, "Nothing, Your Majesty."

4-5. As it began to dawn, the king looked up and saw someone waiting to see him. He asked his servant, "Who's coming to see me this early in the morning?" The servant replied, "It's Haman, Your Majesty." The king ordered, "Bring him in."

6-7. When Haman came in, the king said, "Haman, what should I do for someone I want to honor?" Haman thought that the king was thinking about him.

8-9. So he answered, "Your Majesty, I would have a servant bring a royal robe for him, put him on your horse,

and then have an official lead him through the city calling out, 'This is what the king does for a man he wants to honor.'

10. The king said, "That's a good idea. Go and get one of my robes, my best horse, and do everything you said for Mordecai. He saved my life, and I never honored him for it."

11. Haman had no choice. He went and got Mordecai, put a royal robe on him, helped him onto the king's horse, and led him through the streets saying, "This is what the king does for a man he wants to honor."

12. After they returned to the palace, Mordecai went back and sat in the city square by the gate, but Haman was really upset and hurried home as fast as he could.

13. He called his wife and friends together and told them what had happened. When they heard it, they said, "You've already lost most of your influence with the king. If Mordecai is really a Jew and he saved the king's life, your plan won't succeed. You'll only hurt yourself."

14. While they still were talking, the king's servant came and hurried Haman off to the queen's banquet.

Haman Is Hanged

7 The queen welcomed the king and Haman to the second banquet she had for them. As they were eating, the king said to Esther, "Tell me, what can I do for you? I will give you anything, up to half the kingdom."

3-4. The queen said, "Your Majesty, this is my request. If I have found favor in your eyes, spare my life. And spare the lives of my people. That's all I ask. We have been singled out to be killed. If we were going to be made your slaves, we would have kept quiet. But we are all scheduled to be

executed and our property taken."

5-7. The king responded, "Who gave such an order? Where is he?" Esther replied, "Haman. He hates my people." When Haman heard that, he was terrified and couldn't hide his guilt. The king stormed out of the banquet hall and paced in the palace gardens to regain his composure. Haman stayed with Esther to beg for mercy.

8. He even threw himself on the couch where Esther was just as the king came back. When he saw Haman, he exploded and exclaimed, "Don't tell me that this man is threatening the queen right in my presence!" When the king's personal servant heard that, he rushed in, pulled Haman off the couch, and covered Haman's face as a sign of death.

9-10. Then another servant spoke up, "Your Majesty, this man built a framework by his house on which to hang Mordecai, the man who saved your life." The king commanded, "Take this man and hang him on it." So they took Haman and hanged him on the framework built for Mordecai. Then the king's anger subsided.

Esther Saves the Day

8 That same day, the king gave all of Haman's money to Esther. And when she told him that Mordecai was her cousin, the king made him prime minister in place of Haman. He gave Mordecai his ring, and Esther put him in charge of Haman's money.

3. Sometime later Esther again risked her life to go and see the king uninvited. Again he held his scepter out to her. She came and fell at his feet crying, begging him to change the plan that Haman had put in place to kill all her people.

4-6. The king offered his scepter as a sign for her to continue. So she stood

and said, "Your Majesty, if you care about me and it seems right to you, let an order be written to overrule Haman's order, which he wrote in your name. Please help, because I couldn't stand to see my family killed."

7-8. Mordecai was also there, so the king said to both of them, "Haman was against the Jews, but I had him hanged and gave all his money to Esther. I want you, Mordecai, to write an order in my name on behalf of the Jews to override the first order, which can't be changed. Then stamp it with my ring to make it legal."

9-10. So on the twenty-third day of the third month, Mordecai called in the king's secretaries and dictated a new order. He had them translate it into every language in the country. The riders took the order to all the governors of the provinces from India to Ethiopia as fast as the horses could go.

11-12. This order gave the Jews the right to defend themselves, kill their attackers, and take their property. It was to go into effect on the thirteenth day of the last month of the year.

13-14. A copy of the new order was read and posted in every city throughout the country so that everyone would know that the Jews had a right to self-defense. A copy was also read and posted in the nation's capital.

15-17. Almost everyone in the city was glad to see Mordecai in his blue-and-white outfit with a crown of gold on his head and a purple mantle over his shoulder. The Jews were especially glad and made the day when the new order was given a day of celebration. And many of the people claimed to be Jews, because they were afraid of what the Jews might do to them.

The Jews and Their Enemies

9 So on the thirteenth day of the last month of the year, when the Jews were supposed to be killed, they were allowed to fight back and defend themselves. In every city the Jews got ready, but the people were scared to attack them.

3-4. All the governors and officials helped the Jews because they knew of Mordecai's influence with the king. He became more and more important both in the palace and throughout the empire.

5-10. Some people were just waiting for the day to attack the Jews. But when they did, the Jews fought back. In the nation's capital the Jews were attacked by the ten sons of Haman and their friends. All of them were killed. But the Jews did not take their property, even though they were allowed to do that.

11-12. At the end of the day the king asked for a report. Then he called in Esther and said, "Right here in the capital, more than 500 people were killed, including the ten sons of Haman. This gives you some idea of how many must have been killed throughout the country. Now, is there anything else I can do for you?"

13-15. Esther answered, "Your Majesty, would you extend the order for one more day here in Susa so that the bodies of the ten sons of Haman can be hung in public for all to see?" The king agreed. The next day the Jews defended themselves and killed 300 more people. But they did not take their property, even though they could have.

16. The Jews throughout the country defended themselves. Altogether they killed more than 75,000 people who attacked them. But they did not take their property, as they were allowed to do.

17. All this happened on the thir-

teenth day of the last month of the year. On the fourteenth they rested and turned it into a holiday by giving each other gifts.

The Festival

18-19. In the capital the Jews had even one more day to defend themselves. So they had their holiday a day later on, the fifteenth. The Jews in the provinces made the fourteenth a permanent holiday to be kept by giving gifts.

20-22. Then Mordecai sent letters to the Jews in every province, asking them to make the fifteenth a holiday too. He urged them to remember these two days as a time when God delivered them from their enemies and turned a day of sorrow into joy. He also told them not to give gifts just to each other but also to those in need.

23-25. So that's what the Jews did. They called these holidays the Festival of Purim, meaning "The day determined by the casting of lots." Because this is how Haman had come up with the day when all Jews should be killed. But Esther had changed all that.

26-28. Every Jewish family kept these two holidays to remember what God

had done. And they passed this tradition on to their children and to anyone who might become a Jew. These two holidays have been kept by every Jewish generation.

29-31. Then Esther also wrote a letter to all the Jews in the country supporting what Mordecai had said. The letter was filled with a message of peace and was signed by both Esther and Mordecai. Esther's signature gave it added authority.

32. That's how the Festival of Purim was made an official holiday and now both letters were made part of the royal record.

Mordecai's Reward

10 About this time, King Xerxes increased taxes throughout the empire. He was a powerful ruler. Everything he did is recorded in the book of the Persian kings, together with what Mordecai did.

3. Mordecai was second in command after the king, and was honored and well liked by all the people. The Jews especially honored him because he had saved their lives and always had their best interests at heart.

Job

INTRODUCTION: *Some think that Moses wrote this book, because for a time he lived in the same country Job lived in. Events in this book took place around 1500 B.C. Terrible things happened to Job. He lost all his children and herds and flocks. Then Job himself got sick. Three of his friends came to see him, and they discussed why they thought that God had let all these things happen to Job. From this book we learn that bad things happen to good people. But this does not mean that God is punishing them for some sin, or that God causes bad things to happen. God told Job and his friends to trust Him. Then God healed Job and helped him become wealthy again.*

Job and His Family

1 There was a good man named Job who loved God with all his heart. He had seven sons and three daughters. He also had thousands of sheep and camels and hundreds of oxen and donkeys, and he had many servants. He was a rich man.

4-5. When his sons were grown, they took turns giving banquets for the whole family. After each banquet, Job asked his children to commit themselves to the Lord anew. He would also sacrifice a lamb for each of them and ask God to forgive them in case they had sinned.

Satan Talks to God About Job

6-8. God's representatives throughout the universe meet with Him regularly. One day Satan wanted to join the group. God asked, "What planet do you represent?" Satan answered, "Planet Earth." God said, "Have you noticed My servant Job? He's a good man and very faithful. He loves Me with all his heart."

9-11. Satan replied, "He's good only because You're good to him. You've protected him and his family and have given them everything they need. He has huge flocks and herds and is the richest man in the area. If

You take everything away from him, he'll curse You."

12. God said, "Let's test what you say. You may take everything away from him, but don't touch him." Satan agreed and went back to earth.

13-15. One day while Job's children were at their brother's house, a servant came running to see Job. He said, "We were working with the oxen in the field, and the donkeys were grazing nearby. Suddenly raiders came and attacked us and took all the animals. When we resisted, they killed all the servants, and I'm the only one who escaped."

16. He had hardly finished speaking when another servant came running up and said, "We were in the field watching the sheep when a terrible thunderstorm came up. Lightning flashed, rolled along the ground, and killed all the sheep and the shepherds. I'm the only one who escaped."

17. He had hardly finished when a third servant came running up and said, "Three raiding parties attacked us and took all the camels and the servants. I'm the only who escaped."

18-19. He had hardly finished when a fourth servant came running up and said, "Your sons and daughters were having a banquet at their brother's

place when a powerful wind came in from the desert. It hit the house so hard that it collapsed and killed everyone inside. I'm the only one who got out alive."

20-22. Job was stunned. He got up, tore his robe, and shaved his head in grief. Then he went outside, fell on his knees, and prayed. He said, "I was born with nothing, and I'll leave with nothing. Lord, You give and You take away. I'll praise Your name forever." In all of this Job did not sin by blaming God.

Satan Talks to God Again

2 The next time there was a meeting in heaven, Satan wanted to join the group again. God asked, "What brings you here?" Satan replied, "I'm in charge of everything on earth." God said, "What about My servant Job? You're not in charge of him. You took everything away from him, yet he still holds on to Me. He did not sin by blaming Me when you nearly destroyed him."

4-6. Satan answered, "A man will do anything to protect his body to stay healthy and strong. If You touch his body, he'll turn against You." God said, "Let's test what you say. You have My permission to touch him, but don't take his life."

7-8. Satan agreed and went back to earth. He struck Job with big festering sores, which broke out all over his body. Then Job went to sit by the city dump. So much pus oozed from his sores that he had to scrape it off.

9. His wife came to see him. "God has turned against you," she said. "Why don't you just forget Him and die? He's certainly not helping you!"

10. Job replied, "Don't talk like that. When God blesses us, we praise Him. When He lets troubles come, should we not accept them?" In spite of all

that he had lost and his intense pain, Job did not turn away from God.

Job's Three Friends

11-12. Job's three friends heard what had happened and decided to go visit him. They were shocked. They hardly recognized Job. They tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads in sympathy and grief.

13. They sat down on the ground with him for a whole week without saying a thing. They hurt so much for their friend that they didn't know what to say.

Job Doesn't Want to Live

3 Job was really in pain. After a week of silence he spoke: "I hate the day I was born, when they said to my parents, 'You have a baby boy.'"

4-6. "I wish that God would take that day off the calendar. I wish the sun would stop shining on that day. And I wish that night would be the darkest night on record. I wish that day would not even be counted as a day."

7-12. "I wish that no other babies would be born on that day. May people hate that day. May it never see the morning star or have a sunrise. Why was I born that night? It brought me into a world full of troubles. I wish I had died when I was born. Why did my mother take such good care of me?"

13-19. "If I had died, I would be asleep and would not know all of this. I would be resting with kings. I wish I had died as soon as I was born. In the grave people sleep and have no troubles. Even the wicked rest in the grave. Slaves no longer have to work. The small and the great are all there, and all their troubles are gone."

20-23. "Why is life filled with so much trouble and disappointment? Why do

sick people have to live with so much pain when it would be easier to die? I'm sure some would be glad to die rather than suffer. Why does God let things like this happen?

24-26. "When I see food, I don't feel like eating. All night I'm in pain. Everything I ever feared has happened to me. I have no peace in my heart. I have no quietness. I can't rest because of all the trouble that has come upon me."

Eliphaz Speaks Up

4 Then Job's friend Eliphaz said, "If I say something, Job, don't get mad at me. Even if you do, I have to say it. You've done a lot of good in your life. You helped a lot of people. You helped the poor and those who were weak. You made the sick feel better and gave them hope. And you gave courage to those who needed it. **5-6.** "So now you're sick and have troubles. You'd like to die and get it over with. Why don't you tell yourself what you told others? Why blame God? Your faith in Him should give you hope and courage. It should make you want to live.

7-11. "Have you ever seen a really good person suffer? Good people don't lose everything they have in one day, as you have. From what I've seen in life, those who cause trouble get it back. God turns against them. The wicked may complain, but it doesn't change things. They growl like lions, but die anyway.

12-16. "Something happened to me recently that I haven't told anyone. A message came to me during the night, so quietly that I could hardly hear it. I had just gone to sleep when I had a very bad dream. A ghost passed right in front of me. I was so scared that my hair stood straight

up. The ghost turned toward me and in a quiet voice said,

17-21. "'Can a human being be as good as God? If God had to cast some angels out of heaven because He couldn't trust them, you can be sure He'll deal with the wicked. Besides, a man could be alive today and dead tomorrow. Things will go on without him. What he owned and what wisdom he had will not help him.'

Eliphaz Continues

5 "Job, do you think that angels from heaven will come to help you when you're so upset? Being mad at what's happened to you won't change it. And being envious of those who are healthy is foolish.

3-7. "I've seen successful men who acted foolishly suddenly have things turn against them. Their children never felt safe again, and no one helped them. People stole their crops, and others robbed their houses. A man's troubles don't come out of nowhere. He usually brings troubles on himself.

8-14. "Based on my dream, if I were you I would ask God for forgiveness. He works all kinds of miracles. He brings on the rain. He blesses good people and turns against the crafty and proud. He traps those who think they're so smart in their own wisdom so that nothing they do succeeds. They grope like blind men.

15-19. "But God helps the needy. He gives hope to the poor. He keeps injustice at a distance. He corrects people He loves. So don't be resentful when God disciplines you, because He will also heal you. No matter what happens to you, it can't destroy you, because God is with you.

20-24. "God will take care of you. He

will protect you and save you from all the bad things people say about you. Then you'll laugh and won't be afraid. Your crops will grow. There will be peace in your house, and nothing will be stolen.

25-27. "You will have many children, and they will have children. When you're old, you will still be healthy and strong. Many of us have looked into what I have said and found it to be true. When a man repents of his sins, things turn around. So think about it and apply it to yourself."

Job Answers Eliphaz

6 Job said to his friend Eliphaz, "I think you're wrong. If my pain and grief could be put on a scale and weighed, then you would understand why I feel the way I do. I feel as if God shot me with a poison arrow. It seems that God is against me.

5-7. "Does a donkey bray when it has food? Does a cow moo when it's eating? Don't people salt tasteless food? There's a reason that people and animals do certain things. Right now I have no reason to live. Just looking at food makes me sick.

8-10. "How I wish that God would just let me die. That's what I want. If I died, at least my pain would end. My heart would be at rest, because I know that I have never rebelled against God or His word.

11-13. "What is there to live for? Why should I go through all this pain? Even if I wanted to I save myself, I am not made of iron. My strength is almost gone. So where can I turn for help?

14-20. "When a man is sick, he needs friends who understand and help him. You're my friends, but you haven't helped me. You're as useless as streams that dry up in the summer's heat. Caravans go where there's

water, because they know their camels will need to drink.

21-23. "But you're no help to me. You're even afraid to come close. I didn't expect you to bring me presents. A man should not have to pay his friends to help him. I don't expect you to heal me, only to understand what I'm going through.

24-27. "Answer me, and I'll be quiet. Tell me what I've done wrong. You haven't said anything to convince me that God is punishing me for my sins. Why don't you take what I say seriously? Aren't you my friends? Why are you treating my words as if they're not worth listening to?

28-30. "Look at me! Would I lie to you? Would I be dishonest with my closest friends? Don't condemn me for no reason. Don't you think I can still tell right from wrong?

Job Continues

7 "Man only lives a few years on earth. Much of that time is spent working. He longs for the day's work to end, and to get paid. For months I've longed for relief from pain. At night I can't wait until the sun comes up. My body is covered with festering sores and scabs. Even worms crawl over me as if I were already dead.

6-10. "My days are as useless as loose threads dangling from a piece of woven cloth. My life has flown by as fast as a passing wind. I'll never be happy again. Soon I'll be gone. Life is like a cloud that passes by. When someone dies, that's the end. He will never come back to his house again.

11-16. "I just can't keep quiet. I'm talking this way because I hurt so much inside. Don't look at me like that. I'm not some kind of a monster. I look for relief, but You've only scared

me with Your ghostly dream. I don't want to live in this rotting body. I want to die. Just leave me alone!

17-20. "Lord, why do You even bother with someone human? Why do You give him so much attention? Every morning You examine him and then test him during the day. Do You ever look away? Why are You making me Your target? What have I done to You?"

21. "If You want to help me, then forgive my sins. Soon I will die, and when You look for me, I'll be gone."

Bildad Speaks Up

8 Job's friend Bildad spoke up and said, "Job, are you finally finished? That surely was a long answer. Your words are like a lot of hot air. They mean nothing. Is God ever unjust? Doesn't He always do what is right?"

4-7. "Your children must have sinned terribly against God to be killed the way they were. But you're still alive. God is giving you a chance to repent. Ask Him to forgive you. If you had been pure and truthful, God would not have let this happen to you. You must be honest with Him; then He will heal you and give you more than you've lost."

8-10. "Stop and think of what people before us learned from experience. Our lives are short compared to theirs. They lived a long time. So what do we learn from them? They know that God does not punish those who are good."

11-15. "Look at nature. It too teaches the same thing. Grass can't grow where there is no water. When it doesn't rain, everything dries up. It's the same with people who turn away from God. Their hope dries up, and the next thing, they're gone. Their faith is as weak as a spider's web. They lean on it, but it can't hold them up."

16-19. "Bad people are like weeds in a garden. They grow fast. But when they're pulled up, people forget that they were even there. They just enjoy the rest of the garden."

20-22. "God does not turn against a good man and bless a bad one. If you confess your sins and ask God to forgive you, He will heal you and make you laugh again. He will shame your enemies, and those who hate you will be no more."

Job Answers Bildad

9 Job said, "I know that some of what you say is true. But you don't understand. No one can be so good that he never makes a mistake. How can he ever expect to answer all of God's questions? No one can say that he has a right to be blessed because he was perfectly good."

5-7. "God can move mountains and flatten them. He can send an earthquake and cause buildings to fall. He speaks to the sun and it stops shining, to the stars and they stop twinkling."

8-12. "He made the heavens. He walks on oceans. He made the stars and arranged them in order—Big Bear, Orion, and the constellations in the south. He does wonders, and no one knows how He does it all. He is close to us, and we can't see Him. If He decides to take back what He has given, who can stop Him?"

13-17. "When God decides to discipline a man, who can argue with Him? Even if I were perfect, I couldn't win. All I can do is plead my case and ask Him to be kind to me. When I call on Him for help, it's hard to believe that He's even listening to me. He can punish me if that's what He decides, and who can stop Him?"

18-20. "He doesn't let me catch my breath. What can I do? No one is

stronger than God. Who is going to sit and judge Him? Even if I tried, I would end up condemning myself, not Him. And if I tried to judge Him, my faulty human nature would disqualify me.

21-24. "As far as I know, I have never rebelled against God. Even if I had never made a mistake, I'm too sick to argue about it. We all have to die someday. But God never dies. When troubles come and death is close, when bad people take over a whole country, when judges ignore the rights of the people, where is God? Why does He let all this happen?"

25-28. "My days go by one after another, but there's no joy. Time races along like a sailboat and flies as quickly as an eagle. I'm only fooling myself when I say that things will change. The truth is that I dread what's coming next. But it really doesn't matter."

29-31. "If I had rebelled against God as you say I did, then why should I struggle to stay alive? It's all over with. If I'm guilty in your eyes, there's nothing I can do to be clean. In your minds, God let all this happen to me because I sinned. You're putting me into the slime pit of evil no matter what good things I have done."

32-35. "God is not a human being that I can take to court. If only I had someone to help me, someone to put his hand on my shoulder and speak for me. If only someone could stop God from letting all this happen to me. Then I could say what's on my heart and wouldn't have to be scared of what might happen to me next. But as it is, what can I do?"

talking this way. Just tell me what it is that You have against me. Why did You let this happen to me and yet not do anything about the wickedness that's everywhere?"

4-9. "With Your eyes You can see everything. You know more than we do. Why are You testing my faith like this? Are You trying to uncover my sins? You already know that I never rebelled against You. You made me; why would You destroy me? You molded me from clay; why would You turn me back to dust?"

10-14. "When I grew inside my mother, You put my bones together and covered them with muscles and skin. You gave me life and loved me. You watched over me and cared for me. Why did You do all this for me? I'm beginning to think that all along You planned to test me to see if I would turn against You."

15-17. "If I turn against You, I'm in trouble. If I stick by You, I'm tested. I am filled with shame and drowning in pain. If I try to be full of confidence in You, You seem to be against me. You bring witnesses against me. My friends accuse me of being secretly wicked. All these charges are like armies coming against me."

18-19. "Why did You let me be born? I wish I had died before anyone saw me. If only I had been carried straight to the grave."

20-22. "Isn't my life just about over anyway? Lord, just leave me alone. Let me have a few moments of peace before I die. Soon I'll leave and never come back. Soon I'll go where the light of day never shines."

Job Continues

10 "I'm tired of living. That's why I'm complaining so much. O God, don't condemn me for

Zophar Speaks Up

11 Then Job's friend Zophar said, "Isn't anyone going to answer Job? He thinks that all

his talking will make him look good. And that we will change our minds.

3-4. "Job, do you think that your lies will shut us up? How can you question what God does and not be rebuked by Him? You think that your understanding of God is true and that you've been good all your life.

5-6. "I wish that God would talk to you and set you straight. You're looking at things your way. But there are some things too deep for anyone to know. Because God is good, He's most likely punishing you less than you deserve.

7-9. "Can you understand how God thinks? Can you be as wise and perfect as God is? His wisdom is higher than the heavens. The grave won't hide you from God. He knows everything. His knowledge has no limits. It is bigger than the whole world and broader than the oceans.

10-12. "If God decides to judge you, you can't stop Him. He knows people's hearts. He knows whether they're telling the truth or not. An empty-headed man can no more become wise than a wild horse can be born tame or a donkey can give birth to a baby.

13-16. "If you would give your whole heart to God and be truthful about what you've done, then you could face Him with hope and courage. You would forget all your troubles. They would flow away like water going downstream.

17-19. "Your life would be full of sunshine. You would feel good again. You would feel secure, knowing that God is there to protect you. You would have peace in your heart. At night you would stop worrying and go to sleep. You' wouldn't have to be scared that someone would come and hurt you. During the day people would again come to you for counsel.

20. "But it's just the opposite for the wicked. Their lives are full of fear.

They look for a way to escape from God. The only hope they have is to die quickly and disappear."

Job Answers Zophar

12 Job responded, "You sound as if you know everything. Are you the only one who is wise? I can think too. Who doesn't know everything you just said? You didn't say anything new.

4-5. "I thought that you three were my friends. Yet you make fun of me when I tell you that I have not turned against God. When men are prosperous and strong they tend to look down on those who are upright but poor.

6. "Remember that godless men and thieves also prosper. Does that mean that God helps them? They thank their idols for blessings and forget that God is the one who provides what they need.

7-10. "Look at the animals, the birds, and the fish. They'll teach you about God. Nature knows that the Lord created everything and that He's still in control. The life of every living thing is in His hand.

11-13. "Just as the mouth can taste food, so the ear can test words. Old people have insight and understanding because of their years of experience. But only God has wisdom enough to know the future.

14-15. "When He decides to tear down, who can rebuild? When he decides to discipline, who can stop Him? When He holds back the rain, there's drought. When He turns the rain loose, floods come.

16-18. "God is powerful. The victory is His. He knows who is honest and who is not. He can take away the wisdom of counselors and judges. He can free people from prison and take away the power of kings.

19-25. "He strips priests of their pride and takes away the understanding of the elders. He humbles princes and takes away the weapons of the mighty. He explains things hard to understand and brings light out of darkness. He makes nations great and then destroys them. He takes away the reasoning of rulers, and they grope in the dark as if they were drunk.

Job Continues

13 "I have seen what you have seen. I have heard what you have heard. What you know I know. But I don't want to reason with you as much as I want to reason with God.

4-6. "All you're doing is smearing me with lies. You're like worthless doctors who can't help people. I wish you'd stop talking and listen to what I'm trying to tell you.

7-9. "Why do you judge me as if you're God? How dare you try to defend God with lies. What would happen if God examined you? Could you defend yourself before Him as you would before a judge?

10-12. "God knows if you're slanting the truth. Doesn't His majesty and power frighten you? Your speeches are as useles as ashes. Your arguments are as weak as clay.

13-16. "Be quiet and let me talk to God. Whatever He decides to do, let it happen. I'm ready to take a chance with Him. Though He takes my life, I will still trust Him. I'll continue to talk to Him, because He loves me. In the end He will save me. A liar wouldn't dare say that.

17-18. "Listen to me. I'm ready to state my case before God, because I know what He'll say." Then Job prayed,

19-21. "O God, please listen to me. I'm ready to defend myself and show that

I am innocent of these charges. If You prove me wrong, I'll be quiet and die. But before we talk, please do two things for me. Please stop what's happening to me and help me not to be so afraid of You.

22-25. "Lord, if You want to speak first, I'll be happy to answer. I guess I'll have to speak first, because I can't hear You. If I have rebelled against You, please let me know. Why are You hiding Yourself from me as if I were Your enemy? Why would You even bother with me? I'm nothing but a shriveled leaf blown by the wind; nothing but a piece of straw.

26-28. "Did You turn against me because of the bad things I did when I was young? That's like tying me to the past with chains. I'm already too sick to move, I feel like a rotten piece of wood to be thrown away, like a moth-eaten coat ready to fall apart.

Job Continues His Prayer

14 "Lord, man lives a very short time, and he has many troubles. We're like flowers that bloom and then quickly fade and die. Why do You even bother with people? Why do You take time to listen to us?

4-6. "Who can make himself pure? No one, no matter how long he lives. In one way it's good that people don't live long, or they would sin more and more. Why do You bother with us? It would be easier just to leave us alone.

7-9. "There's more hope for a tree than for us. We cut it down, and it sprouts again because the roots are good. If the roots are old, the stump will rot. But if there's water nearby, there's hope. Even old roots will take hold and live.

10-12. "But when man dies, what hope does he have? His life is gone like water that evaporates, like streams that dis-

appear in drought. Man dies, and nothing happens to him until the end, when God raises him from the dead.

13-17. "Lord, please let me sleep in the grave until this world is over. Just don't forget me. When You call to wake me up, I'll answer You. Then You won't have to test me. My sins will be gone, sealed up and forgotten.

18-19. "Mountains crumble and rocks fall from cliffs. Water wears away stones, and floods carry away soil. So our hope is in Your hands.

20-21. "When You take a man's life, his face changes and people bury him. If his children become rich or poor, he doesn't know it.

22. "When a man is in pain, he grieves for himself."

Eliphaz Speaks Up Again

15 Job's friend Eliphaz replied, "No man with any sense would talk the way you do, Job. Your words are full of hot air and mean nothing.

4-6. "If people heard you talking to God as if He were your neighbor, no one would be in awe of Him. They wouldn't worship Him anymore. You condemn yourself just by the way you've talked to God.

7-10. "Are you the first man who ever lived? Were you there when God created the world? Do you listen in on His councils? Why do you think you know so much? Do you have more insight than we do? We are on the side of the old men, men older than your father.

11-12. "Doesn't God's love mean anything to you? We came to comfort you with kind and gentle words, but you're not listening. Why are you so upset and impatient?

13-16. "How dare you talk to God the way you do? It sounds as if you're questioning His judgment. If God

couldn't even trust all the angels, why should He trust a sinful human being?

17-19. "Listen to me, Job, and let me explain. Let me tell you what I've seen, and what men of experience have taught me. This goes back to the time of our ancestors, before foreigners led people away from God.

20-23. "An evil man is tormented by his wickedness. At night he's afraid; just when he thinks he's secure, men break into his house. He's like a marked man trying to escape the police. He walks the street as if vultures are about to attack and eat him. He knows that one day someone will get him.

24-26. "His days are also filled with terror, coming on him like a marching army. This is how it is with a man who shakes his fist at God and rebels against Him. He dares to challenge God like a warrior ready for battle.

27-28. "Even though he's big and strong, he will not survive. Though he takes over a whole city and makes all the houses his own, one day he will lose everything he has.

29-30. "All his wealth will be gone. His possessions will vanish, and he will not escape. He will wither like a tree whose branches are burned by a forest fire. With His breath God will take him away.

31-33. "If he trusts his wicked schemes, he'll receive his reward and perish forever. He'll be like a vine stripped of its grapes, like an olive tree that loses its blossoms.

34-35. "The wicked will not live forever. Fire will burn up the houses of those who got their money dishonestly. Such people are always thinking up evil schemes. They're full of lies and deceit."

Job Answers Eliphaz

16 Job said, "I've heard all that before. What you say does not comfort me. The three of

you keep giving me these long-winded speeches. When did you become authorities on everything?

4-6. "I could give the same speeches you do. If we traded places, I too could sit there and shake my head. But I would try to comfort you and do what I could to relieve your grief. But nothing I say to defend myself relieves my grief. Even if I stop talking, the pain is still there."

Job Prays

7-8. Job prayed, "O God, You have worn me down. You have taken my children and everything I had. Am I Your enemy? My body is shriveled, and people think that I've rebelled against You."

9-10. "You have torn me apart. I feel that You don't like me anymore. When people come by, they sneer at me. Some even slap me in the face. Then they get together and come to ridicule me."

11-14. "O God, have You abandoned me? Everything seemed fine before. Now it seems as if You took me by the neck and pushed my face in the dirt. I feel as if I've been hit by Your arrows and the ground is soaked with my blood. You have come at me again and again, like a warrior determined to kill me."

15-17. "I sit here next to this garbage heap covered in sackcloth. My face is red from crying; my eyes are shadowed with dark circles. But I know I have not rebelled against You. I have not done anything violent or cruel. Lord, my prayer is sincere, and I'm truly innocent."

18-19. "Don't let the grave cover me until this misunderstanding is cleared up. I know that You are my judge and my defense attorney."

20-22. "No matter how I feel, I know that You are my friend. You know how

much I have cried. O God, plead my case, because I'm Your friend too. Only a few more days, a year at the most, and I'll be gone."

Job Continues to Pray

17 "My spirit is broken. I don't have long to live. Every day people come and make fun of me."

3-5. "O God, I'm being totally honest with You. No one prays or speaks up for me. It seems that You have purposely closed their minds. All they do is denounce me. That's a bad example for their children, because then they'll do the same thing."

6-8. "Everyone is talking about me. They even spit in my face. My eyes are getting weaker; I'm a shadow of my former self. Good men are shocked by what they see; they believe that I've sinned, and they turn against me."

9-10. Then Job said to his friends, "The man who knows that he has done right holds on. The man who is innocent will grow stronger. Even if you repeat your criticism of him, you'll only show how little you know."

11. "The years have slipped by. My hope is gone, and so is my desire to live."

12-16. "You tell me that change is around the corner. But I know better. Soon I will die. So if the grave is going to be my father and mother, and my body will rot away, what will happen to hope? My hope will sleep with me in the grave."

Bildad Speaks Again

18 Job's friend Bildad said, "Will your long speeches and prayers ever end so that we can really talk to each other? Why do you talk to us as if we're dumb animals and don't know anything? Why

are you so angry with us? Should the earth be rearranged for your sake? Should the way things work be turned upside down?

5-9. "A wicked man's life will not last. He will die and be gone forever. Though he was once young and strong, when he gets old he will be weak. He will have to face what he has done. He's caught in his own net and can't get out.

10-16. "It's as if he has a rope around his neck. He's afraid of what's coming next. Disease eats away at his body. Death is near. Then they bury him. He can no longer live in his house. Burning ashes are scattered over his grave. He's like a dead tree—his roots are dried up, and his branches are gone.

17-19. "Soon no one even remembers his name. He sleeps in darkness. He can have no more children. No member of his family will survive, no matter where they live.

20-21. "People from the east are shocked at what happens to him, and so are people from the west. What I just told you is the future of the wicked. This is what a man who doesn't know God can expect."

Job Answers Bildad

19 Job responded, "How long will you torment me with speeches like that? You keep telling me that I must have rebelled against God. Even if I had, it's my business, not yours. It seems to me that you're using my situation to make yourselves look good. But if you're right, then God has set a trap and caught me in His net.

7-10. "When I cry for justice and ask for help, no one answers. God has covered my path with darkness so that I can't see where I'm going. He has taken away my honor and all that

I own. He is tearing me down as He would an old house. He has uprooted my hope as He would a dead tree.

11-12. "God seems to be angry with me and considers me His enemy. He has sent his heavenly army against me, and I can't escape.

13-16. "My own brothers have turned against me. My relatives ignore me. And my friends say that I've turned against God. Those who were guests at my house have forgotten me, and my servants act as if they don't know me. Even my personal servant doesn't come when I call him.

17-19. "My family can't stand to be around me. Children laugh and make faces at me. My friends detest me, and those I love turn away from me.

20-22. "I'm nothing but skin and bones and am on the verge of dying. Have pity on me and don't keep telling me that I must have been bad. God let all this happen. For some reason He has decided to do this to me. Now you're after me too. Will you ever quit?

23-27. "I wish someone would write all this down and put it in a book. I wish someone would carve my words in stone. But I do have a Redeemer. In the end He'll come to take me home. Even after my body rots away, I will be resurrected. I will see Him for myself. Oh, how I long for that day!

28-29. "You men keep after me as if all my troubles are my own fault. You need to be careful, because if you're wrong and I'm innocent of rebelling against God, He will punish you. Don't forget that a day of judgment is coming for everyone."

Zophar Speaks Up Again

20 Job's friend Zophar answered, "You have upset me so much that I just have to speak up. I heard you rebuke all three

of us. I feel insulted. You know how it's always been; the happiness of the wicked doesn't last.

6-11. "An evil man becomes great and then is so proud that his head is in the clouds. One day he'll be gone. Those who knew him will say, 'What happened?' His family and friends will never see him again. His children will have to restore what he took; they will have to return his wealth. His vigor is gone; his body is nothing but dust.

12-19. "He liked to outsmart people and get what he wanted. He would smack his lips over what he did. But his actions turned into a poisonous snake. He will never see the river of life. He will have to give up everything he worked so hard for, because he robbed the poor and took houses that were not his.

20-25. "His wealth cannot save him; he can take nothing with him. In the midst of his riches he will realize that he must face God. Just when his stomach is full, God will take hold of him. If he tries to escape, God's arrow will get him. He is terrified.

26-29. "Suddenly everything he has means nothing. It's as if it had all been burned up. He knows his end has come. Heaven will show his guilt. What he's done will testify against him. In the day of judgment all he depended on will be washed away. This is the appointed future of wicked men."

Job Answers Zophar

21 Job answered, "Listen to me. That's all I'm asking of you. Be patient and hear me out. Then if you want to mock me, go ahead. I'm not really talking to you about all my troubles, but to God.

5-6. "Just look at me. It's enough to shock anyone into silence. When I

think of what has already happened, I'm afraid of what might happen next.

7-10. "Why does God allow some wicked people to live a long time and keep getting more power? They see their children prosper and their grandchildren succeed. God doesn't bring disaster on them. Their houses are safe, and their families don't have to worry. Their flocks and herds keep multiplying.

11-13. "They have lots of children who play as carefree as little lambs. They sing and jump and are happy all day long. These men spend their whole lives in comfort and are prosperous until they die.

14-16. "Yet these are the very people who want nothing to do with God. They want to be left alone. They feel no need of God. They never worship Him or serve Him. They don't pray. I know they didn't succeed because of their own goodness, so I don't listen to their advice.

17-19. "How many wicked men end up the way that you say they do? How often has God stepped in and taken away what they have? How many are blown away by disaster? You say that God punishes the wicked and even children for what their fathers have done. God does no such thing. Only in the final judgment will the wicked be punished.

20-21. "How I wish that the wicked would be disciplined now! Maybe it would wake them up and they would feel their need of God. Does a wicked man really care about what example he is to his children? He goes on enjoying life until the day he dies.

22-26. "Can anyone tell God something that He doesn't already know? He's the judge, not us. Some men are healthy all their lives. Others are always sick and die in pain. But they

all die and are buried, whether they lived happy lives or not.

27-30. "I know that you can hardly wait to speak. You're trying to think of all the ways I have sinned. You're just itching to ask, 'Where are these wicked men who are so prosperous?' Have you talked to those who travel? They will tell you how evil men all over the world live in luxury.

31-33. "Who stands up against these wicked men? Who repays wicked rulers and kings for what they have done? They are carried to the grave with great public mourning. Thousands join the funeral procession as a king's body is gently laid to rest. Then honor guards are set up to watch over his tomb.

34. "How can you sit there and tell me that wicked men are punished in their lives for what they have done? Don't try to convince me of your foolish theory."

Eliphaz Speaks Up a Third Time

22 Then Eliphaz said, "Can even the wisest man add to what God knows? Would it make God happy if what you say is right? Does it help Him if you have been good? Is it because you love Him so much that He's judging you?

5-6. "He's disciplining you because you did things that no one else knows. Maybe you charged too much interest on the loans you made to people. Maybe you took away what people who owed you money and couldn't pay had.

7-9. "Maybe God saw you refuse to feed the hungry, help the poor, or give a weary traveler a place to stay. Maybe you got more and more land when you didn't really need it. Maybe you neglected the widows and orphans.

10-11. "Now your world has collapsed, and you're afraid of what might happen to you next. God wouldn't let all

this happen to you for nothing. You're not thinking right. So you say anything that comes to your mind.

12-14. "Isn't God in heaven? Doesn't He see everything that goes on down here? You talk as if God has to be told how you feel, or that He doesn't know what He's doing. Is God covered with clouds, or is He so high up in the sky that He can't see us?

15-17. "How much longer will you justify yourself? That's what the wicked do. They were destroyed in the flood, because God could no longer do anything for them. They said, 'God, leave us alone.' They thought He couldn't stop them.

18-20. "Yet it was God who had blessed them with so many good things. Why they turned against Him no one will ever fully know. Good men will be glad when the wicked are finally gone. Everyone will be relieved. They'll say, 'The wicked are finally gone, and so is all the wealth they got from being dishonest.'

21-25. "Job, you need to make things right with God. Get to know Him again, and He'll bless you. Learn the lessons that He's trying to teach you. If you turn to God with all your heart, He'll restore everything you've lost. If you make God first and money second, He'll be like an endless treasure to you.

26-28. "Then God will be the joy of your life. You can look into His face without being afraid. He will hear your prayers and answer them. If you keep the promises you made to Him, He will honor you. You'll succeed in all you do.

29-30. "When men are humbled by misfortune and you help them and pray for them, God will bless them because of you. He will even bless those who are not as good as they should be because you care about them."

Job Answers Eliphaz

23 Job answered, "I still am bitter. God seems to be against me for no reason. If I only knew where to find Him. I would go to Him and tell Him about my situation. I would ask Him to tell me why He let all this happen. And I would listen carefully to what He said.

6-7. "Would God overwhelm me with His power? No, He would kindly listen to me, because that's how God is. Then He would say that I was innocent of rebellion, and that He knew that I always loved Him.

8-12. "But where can I go to find Him? It doesn't matter; I'll never be able to see Him. He knows where I am. After He tests my faith in Him, I will come out shining as gold. All my life I have followed the road that He marked out for me, and have done my best to keep His commandments. His word has been more important than my daily bread.

13-17. "God is stronger than anyone. He does what He knows is best, and no one can stop Him. What can I say? He made His plans for me, and there's nothing I can do about it. That's why I'm afraid of what will happen to me next. My heart is faint, but I'm not afraid to speak to Him even though I don't know what's ahead of me.

Job Continues

24 "Why doesn't God step in to set things right? Do those of us who love Him have to wait for the day that He'll do that? In the meantime, men move property lines. They steal cattle. They take away a widow's only cow. They even steal from orphans and mistreat the needy.

5-8. "Poor people have to hunt for food the way wild animals do. Children

look for food in garbage cans. They work in other people's fields and harvest grapes in the vineyards of the wicked. They don't have enough clothes to wear and have to sleep in the cold without blankets. They get drenched with rain and huddle under overhanging rocks for shelter.

9-12. "The wicked make slaves of fatherless children and take away a poor man's child as payment for his debts. The poor walk around half naked. They harvest the fields of the wicked and go away hungry. In the cities they're homeless and cry out for help. Yet God seems to hold no one responsible for it.

13-17. "Some people rebel against God's law and want nothing to do with Him. So a hired killer finds his victim and kills him. He robs the rich. When the sun goes down, men and women do bad things together and think, God can't see them. At night thieves break into houses and during the day they hide. They enjoy being evil.

18-21. "But one day the wicked will disappear the same way that foam on water does. Their fields will become a wilderness. As snow melts and is gone, so the grave will take those who have done wickedly. They won't be remembered. They are cut down like trees because they have been unkind to widows and have taken advantage of women who have no children.

22-24. "It's only because of God's patience and mercy that the wicked live. But they have no assurance of eternal life. God sees everything that they do, and He doesn't forget. The wicked may succeed, but soon they die and are taken out of the way.

25. "Can anyone prove that what I said is wrong, or that my words mean nothing?"

Bildad Speaks Up a Third Time

25 Then Bildad said, "God is all-powerful and owns everything. Peace and order are the laws of heaven. Can anyone count His army of angels? Is there a place in the universe where the light of His presence doesn't shine?"

4-6. "How can a man stand before God and claim innocence? If the sun, moon, and stars are as nothing to God, how much less is man? People are like worms compared to the greatness of God."

Job Answers Bildad

26 Job answered, "What a big help you are to me when I'm sick and weak! What have you said to help me and strengthen my faith? What advice have you given me that's good? What have you done to lift my spirits? Who moved you to talk like this? God, or some other spirit?"

5-7. "Can the dead praise God? Can they give themselves life? Death has no power in the presence of God. Graves are not closed to Him. He created the heavens and hung the world in space."

8-10. "He fills clouds with water, and they carry a load of rain. He even covers the moon with clouds. He makes a circle with the ocean's horizon. He causes light and darkness to mark the beginning and the end of each day."

11-14. "The mountains shake when He rebukes them. His power churns the sea or calms the storm. A word from His mouth clears the sky. But these are just glimpses of what He does, whispers and shadows of His greatness. Who can comprehend God's thundering power?"

Job Continues

27 "Even if God decides not to help me, as long as I live I will not do bad things or lie. I will not tell you that I rebelled against God, because I never did. Until I die, I will say that I have been faithful to Him. I will not change my mind. My conscience is clear."

7-10. "Those who accuse me of rebelling against God are no different from the wicked. They have no more hope of living again than do those who are evil. Will God change His mind and give eternal life to the wicked? They should have thought about God and prayed to Him before that time."

11-12. "Let me tell you what I know about the power of God. You've seen much of this yourselves. So what I'm saying is not just my idea."

Zophar Speaks up a Third Time

13-15. Then Zophar quickly spoke up: "Let me interrupt and tell you the future of a wicked man and the reward he'll receive. Some of his sons will be killed in war. Others will be murdered. The time will come when his children won't have enough to eat; those who survive will die of disease. His wife will be glad he died."

16-21. "Though he was rich and wore fine suits, others will divide his wealth and buy themselves expensive clothes. His house is as secure as a spider's web. At night he goes to bed rich, and the next morning his money is gone. Suddenly he's terrified, and that night he is taken away."

22-23. "All this comes on the wicked without mercy, and they can't escape. The wind claps its hands, and they are gone."

Job Answers Zophar

28 Job said, "We know that silver and gold are dug from mines and then refined. Iron and copper are taken out of the earth. Men go into mines to look for precious metal. They dig shafts into the earth and swing from ropes to do their work. On top of the earth food grows, but deep below the surface the earth is on fire.

6-8. "Precious stones and gold are dug from the rocks. No birds are down in the mines. If men die there, no vultures come to feast on their bodies. Wild animals don't go there, not even lions.

9-11. "Men attack the hardest rocks looking for treasure. They dig through the toughest places looking for diamonds. They search for gold where the rivers begin.

12-15. "But where can men go to find wisdom? You can't find it in the earth. You can't find it in yourself. You can't find it anywhere. The seas and oceans tell you that it's not in them.

16-19. "You can't go out and buy wisdom, no matter how much money you have. It's worth more than gold, more than rubies, pearls, and the most precious jewels. Not one of these can be compared to wisdom.

20-22. "Where does wisdom come from? Where does it live? You can't go and look for wisdom, hoping to find it. Even eagles can't see it. Grave and death say they have heard of such a thing as wisdom, but they can't tell you where it is.

23-27. "God alone knows where wisdom is. He sees and knows everything. He made the wind and the seas; He decided where the rain should fall, and set limits on the lightning. He looked at wisdom, examined it closely, and declared its value.

28. "Then He said, 'To respect the

Lord is wisdom, and to stay away from evil is understanding.'"

Job Defends Himself

29 Job continued, "How I long for the days gone by when God watched over me! He was with me and told me where to go when I couldn't see the road ahead. Those were the days when I was full of energy and prospered in all I did. God was my closest friend and protected me. He blessed me, and I had a happy family and many children.

6-10. "My herds provided cream, and my olive trees produced plenty of oil. I sat with the city fathers. Young people stepped aside when I went out, and old men stopped to show their respect. Princes stood in silence until I passed by. The city fathers stopped talking in their meetings until I sat down.

11-13. "Everyone spoke well of me and talked about all the good things I had done, how I helped the poor, the widows, and the orphans. Men who were dying thanked me, and their wives praised me.

14-17. "I always tried to do right and be fair to everyone. This was the wealth I was after, helping people. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was like a father to the poor and cared for strangers who needed help. I broke the power of the wicked and took their victims out of their hands.

18-20. "I expected to live a long and happy life and die at home in bed. I thought that my life would be like a tree whose roots had plenty of water. I thought that I would never lose my reputation, that I would always be healthy and strong.

21-24. "When I gave advice, men would listen and value my counsel. After I spoke, they had nothing more

to add. My words were as gentle as dew. They drank in my words just as a garden drinks in the spring rain. When I smiled, it gave them hope and courage.

25. "Sometimes I helped them make decisions for the city. Other times I kept order the way a king would among troops. Still other times I comforted those who were troubled.

Job Continues

30 "But now things have changed. Young men make fun of me. Their fathers were so irresponsible that I couldn't trust them to take care of my animals. And they are no different. They would rather roam the streets and beg for food than work. They'll eat anything, even leaves from trees, rather than find a job.

5-8. "People can't stand them and drive them out of the neighborhood. At night they sleep in caves, and during the day they walk around like a pack of dogs. They're the riffraff that was driven out of the country and have now come back.

9-12. "They write songs about me as a joke. They come and spit in my face. Just because God let me become helpless and sick, they turn on me. They come at me as a mob would. They threaten me with stones. If they met me in a crowd, they would trip me to make me fall.

13-15. "They break into my house to destroy what's left, and no one stops them. They come at me from all directions. As smoke in the wind vanishes, so has my honor disappeared.

16-20. "My life is giving way. This sickness has taken its toll. My bones ache, and my pain never stops. Disease is like a tight collar choking me. I feel as if God has thrown me in

the mud. I ask Him to help me, but He doesn't answer me."

Job Prays

21-24. Job began to pray, "God, why are You letting all this happen to me? You let me be tossed by the wind, and now You're letting a storm carry me away. I know that I'm going to die from all this. All I can do is beg You for mercy.

25-29. "Lord, didn't I cry with those in trouble and hurt for the poor? But when I looked for happiness in my own life, troubles came. Day after day I suffer. I stand up in public and plead for help, but no one listens. My voice is the same as that of a lonely wolf or a hooting owl.

30-31. "My body is burning with fever. My skin has turned dark and peels off. My harp plays mournful songs, and my flute makes sounds of wailing."

Job Takes a Stand

31 Then Job said, "I have made an agreement with myself. I wouldn't think of looking at a young woman to take the place of my wife. God knows that. If I sinned, how could I receive His approval? The wicked will be punished and come to ruin. God sees what I do; He knows where I go.

5-8. "If I have lied or been deceitful in any way, let God be my judge. He will find that I am innocent of rebelling against Him. If I have turned from doing right, if I have done evil or acted violently, then let my crops fail and someone else eat what's left.

9-12. "I have not desired another man's wife. If I have, then let another man have my wife. To take someone else's husband or wife is wrong and deserves punishment. Once that starts, it's the same as a fire that doesn't stop until it consumes the whole harvest field.

13-15. "If I've been unfair to my employees, how can I face God? What will I be able to say? The God who made me made them too.

16-20. "I have neither ignored the needs of the poor nor let the widows go hungry. I didn't keep my food to myself, but shared it with orphans. When I saw people in rags, I gave them new clothes made from the wool of my best sheep.

21-23. "If I have taken advantage of the fatherless or the poor, may my arms be ripped from their sockets. I respect God and welcome His power to help me and keep me from doing wrong.

24-28. "If I have trusted in money or made it my goal to get rich; if I was ever proud of being wealthy, then I have sinned and should be held guilty. If I ever worshiped the sun or moon, or thanked them for what they have done for me, I would have been disloyal to God and would deserve to be condemned.

29-30. "I have not rejoiced when my enemies suffered, nor have I been pleased when they had disasters. I have not sinned by cursing them or by praying that God punish them.

31-32. "Those who worked for me know that I have fed those who were hungry. I have taken the homeless into my house so that they wouldn't have to spend the night on the street. My doors were open to help them.

33-34. "I have not tried to cover my sins. I did not give in to group pressure or the influence of powerful families.

35-37. "Will no one listen to me? I swear that every word I've said is true. Let God tell me if I'm lying. Let people put in writing what evil I have done to them. I will not cover up anything. If they are right and I'm wrong, I would say so openly. I

wouldn't hide it. God knows everything anyway. I can come to Him and not worry.

38-40. "If my own farms speak against me; if my harvest says that my laborers and those who worked my fields became discouraged because of how I treated them, then let my fields be full of weeds instead of wheat." After this, Job said no more.

A Stranger Speaks Up

32 Job's three friends also stopped talking, because they couldn't convince Job that he was being punished because he had been sinning.

2-5. But a stranger named Elihu had stopped to listen and had heard everything. He was upset with Job and his three friends. Out of respect he had waited until they were finished, because they were older. By this time he was really upset.

6-9. Then he said, "I am young compared to you, so I hesitated to speak. I thought that those older should speak first because they know more. But God gives men wisdom regardless of age. Growing old doesn't always make one wise. Those who are older don't always know what's right.

10-14. "Listen to me. I patiently listened and paid close attention as you told Job that he brought his troubles on himself. Now you're telling yourselves, 'We've failed. God will have to show Job that he's not as innocent as he thinks he is.' I'm not going to pick up the argument where you left off. He was talking to you, not to me. I'll say what I think.

15-20. "Job, your three friends haven't really helped you or answered your questions. Do you want me to be quiet too? No, I'm not going to do that. I could hardly wait until they were

done. I just have to speak up, or I'll burst. I can't hold it in any longer.

21-22. "I'll be fair and not take sides, and I will not flatter anyone. If I did, God would soon take my life.

Elihu Asks Job to Listen

33 "Listen to me, Job, and pay close attention. I will tell you what's on my mind. I'm sincere, and I'll tell you the truth. As sure as God has given me life, I'm going to be honest with you. Answer me when I'm done. Speak up and take your stand.

6-8. "You and I are the same in God's sight. I'm not like your friends who claim to be better than you. Relax, I'm not going to be hard on you, because I respect you. This is what I heard you say to your three friends:

9-11. "I'm innocent. I'm not guilty of rebelling against God. I've done nothing wrong. Yet God treats me as He would an enemy. He watches my every move. I feel as if He's put me in chains."

12-14. "I tell you, Job, you're wrong. God knows more about you than you think. Why would you accuse God of not answering your prayers? God does answer prayer. It's just that we don't always understand things as we should.

15-18. "Sometimes God talks to us through visions and dreams, or the Holy Spirit might whisper in our ears to warn us what not to do or where to go. He does this because He doesn't want us to sin or become proud. He wants to help us be good and then give us eternal life.

19-24. "Sometimes God warns a man by letting him get so sick that he doesn't even feel like eating. His body wastes away, and he gets so skinny that his bones show. He begins to hear the voice of death. Maybe God

will send an angel to rescue him and tell death to back off, because the man's sins are already paid for.

25-28. "Then the man recovers and becomes strong again. He prays, and God listens to him. The man becomes humble and thankful for what God has done for him. He says, 'I have sinned and not done what's right, but God forgave me. He did not give me what I deserved, but redeemed me and kept me from dying. I'm alive and enjoy life again.'

29-33. "God often does this for people, and He'll do it for you, too. He loves to save people from death and make them happy. Are you listening to me, Job? I don't want you to answer me yet, but if you feel you have to, then go ahead. If you can wait, then hear me out. I want to give you some insights into your problem.

Elihu Defends God

34 "I want all of you to listen to me, because I have something important to say. The ear tests words, just as the tongue tests food. Let's look at Job's problem to see if we can agree on a solution.

5-6. "Job claims to be innocent and that God has taken away his right to be heard. He says that he never rebelled against God. He scorns your advice and says that what you've said about him is not true. He says that God has unnecessarily punished him.

7-9. "Have you ever seen such arrogance? He accuses God of being unfair. His attitude shows that he has no respect for God. He says that it doesn't pay to serve Him.

10-12. "Listen to me. Is God ever unfair? Is He ever wrong? God is always just and righteous. He rewards people for the good they do and lets them

reap the consequences of their bad actions. It's unthinkable that God would be unfair.

13-15. "Who told God to take charge of this world? Who gave Him His power? If He decided to take back our lives, who could stop Him? All of us would die!"

16-18. "Listen to me. Can anyone who is unfair govern right? How can anyone condemn God for what He does? He can tell even a prince or a king that he is wrong."

19-20. "God is fair. He doesn't favor kings over common people. He treats everyone, rich or poor, alike. A man might suddenly die in the middle of the night. It can happen through no fault of his own or of anyone's."

21-27. "God sees everything we do. No one can hide from Him, even at night. He doesn't have to investigate or ask questions before taking action. He can overthrow kings and rulers. He does it openly so that people can see what happens to the wicked, to those who don't respect His ways."

28-30. "God hears the cries of the poor. If He did nothing, who could blame Him or condemn Him? He rules the whole world. He keeps the wicked from taking over."

31-32. "Job, have you confessed your arrogance and promised God that you'll not be proud again? Have you asked God to show you things about yourself that you don't know? If He does, are you willing to change your ways?"

33. "Should God reward you on the basis of what you say about yourself? Would that be repentance? You can't have it both ways. You can't set the terms and still call it repentance."

34-37. "Men of good judgment will agree with me. They will say that what Job says doesn't make sense."

Your words are no different than what wicked people say. You think that God must see it your way instead of the other way around. Complaining about God sounds like rebellion to me."

Elihu Condemns Job

35 Elihu continued: "Job, do you really think that you're right? You say that you're innocent in God's sight. Yet you say that it doesn't pay to do good. I want to say something to you and to your three friends."

5-8. "Look at the sky. See how high the clouds are? Yet God is above them. If you sin, what does that do to Him? If you're good, does that add anything to Him? What you do does help or hurt people. But it doesn't add to or take away anything from God and who He is."

9-10. "When people are in trouble, they cry for relief. They want someone to come and help them. Why don't they turn to God? He's the only one who can really help them and make them sing again."

11-13. "Men forget that God created them and made them wiser than the animals. Sometimes God doesn't answer men because they're proud and they think they're so smart. They're interested only in themselves. Why should God make an exception for Job?"

14. "You keep saying that you're waiting for God to answer and do something. Don't think that God just sits there and doesn't pay attention to what's going on. God answers prayer in His own time and way. You just have to wait for it."

15-16. "Think again Job, if you think God doesn't punish wickedness. It's clear that you don't know what you're talking about."

The Goodness of God

36 Elihu continued: "Job, be patient and hear me out. I want to say something on behalf of God. I'm going to give some examples to show you that God is good. I haven't made these things up. I'm not foolish enough to do that.

5-7. "God is all-powerful, but loves everyone. He is also kind and firm in His decisions. He doesn't let the wicked live forever. He makes sure that those who love Him receive what He promised them. He plans to make them part of His royal family to live forever.

8-12. "If people are suffering, He takes the opportunity to show them their sins and draw them closer to Him. He will open their ears and help them listen to His warnings so that they can repent and change. If they do this, He will bless them, and they will prosper. But if they refuse, they'll either be killed or will die without Him.

13-16. "The wicked get angry when God corrects them. They never ask Him for help. Many of them die young. God can reach people through suffering more than any other way. That's what He's trying to do to you, Job. He's trying to get you to have a better attitude. Then He can bless you again.

17-19. "But right now you're reaping the consequences of what you have done. Don't let your former riches influence you. Don't think that you can force God to heal you. All the physical strength and money in the world can't help you get out of your troubles.

20-23. "Don't keep wanting to die. That time will come. Don't keep asking God to heal you so that you can go back to your old way of doing things. Don't forget how great and good God is. There is no teacher like Him. No one can tell God how to

do things or say, 'What you're doing is wrong.'

The Power of God

24-26. "You need to remember how powerful God is and start singing. If you had been good, Job, you would do the same. When men see how powerful God is, they stand in awe. How great God is; He's beyond our understanding. No one can tell how old He is, because He has always been.

27-30. "He takes moisture from the ocean and turns it into rain. He uses clouds to take the rain wherever He wants it to go. We don't know how He does it. He displays His power in the thunder. He spreads His lightning across the sky and lights up the depths of the sea.

31-33. "He uses this same power to govern nations and to feed people around the world. He takes hold of the lightning and directs it toward its mark. His thunder announces the approaching storm. Even the cattle can tell when a storm is coming.

Elihu Challenges Job

37 "I hear a distant storm. My heart is beginning to beat faster. Listen to the voice of God sounding through the thunder. He sends lightning across the sky; then it thunders again, and the sound echoes from the mountains.

5-9. "At God's command amazing things happen. He speaks to the snow, and it covers the earth. He speaks to the rain, and it waters the ground. Men stand in awe of His power. With snow and rain He stops their work. The animals take cover. He calls the storm out of hiding and tells the winds to carry the cold to where He wants it.

10-13. "He freezes the rivers and covers them with ice. He fills clouds with

moisture and flashes lightning in their midst. He tells the clouds to go around the world. He can use storms to punish people or to water the earth to show them that He loves them.

14-16. "Listen to me, Job. Stop and think about the things that God does. Do you know how He does all this? How does He make the lightning obey Him? How can He fill fluffy clouds with water?"

17-20. "Can you change the weather so that when it's hot all over the country, you can stay cool? Can you help God stretch out the sky? Tell us what we should say to God. Maybe you know. But our understanding of God has its limits. I'm not ready to question God. Do you think I want to disappear?"

21-24. "No one can look directly at the sun. When God comes in terrible majesty, who can look at Him and live? The glory of God is so powerful that we can't get near Him. Yet He is just and loves everyone. He never disciplines more than He has to. No wonder people are awed by His presence. He's impartial and fair with everyone, no matter who they are."

God Speaks Up

38 Then God spoke to Job out of the storm and said, "Who is this talking as if he knows everything? Who is confusing people's thinking? Job, I want to ask you some questions, and I would like you to answer.

4-7. "Where were you when I created the world? Who measured out this planet and decided how big it should be? What foundation does the earth rest on? Who laid the cornerstone while the heavenly hosts shouted for joy?"

8-11. "Who controlled the waters when they came bursting out of the

earth? Where were you when I made the clouds or covered the earth with darkness? Where were you when I set boundaries for the oceans? Did you hear Me say to them, 'Stop! This far you will go and no farther'?"

12-15. "Have you talked to the morning or told daybreak to shake the earth awake? Dawn changes the appearance of the earth and makes the hills and valleys come to light. It stops the violence of the night and slows the actions of the wicked.

16-18. "Have you walked the ocean floors and traveled to the springs of its valleys? Have you seen the gates of death and its secrets? Do you have any idea how big the universe is? If you know the answers, I want to hear them.

19-21. "Do you know the source of light? Do you know where darkness lives? Can you tell the light and the darkness what to do? Do you know the answers because you were with Me when I made everything, or because you have great wisdom?"

22-27. "Have you visited the storehouses of snow and hail? I reserve the snow and hail for times of war and battle. Can you go where the lightning begins or where the east wind comes from? Who cuts a path for the thunderstorm or directs the downpour of rain? Can you water the thirsty desert and make grass grow in the wilderness?"

28-30. "Does rain have a human father? Who makes the dewdrops? Does frost have a human mother? Where does the ice that covers part of the earth come from? Who makes the lakes freeze over and become as hard as stone?"

31-33. "Can you hold star clusters together? Can you tell each one to go its own way? Can you guide the constellations across the night sky? Do you know the laws that govern the

universe? Can you manage the affairs of nations?

34-38. "Can you tell the clouds when to rain and when to cool you off? Can you send lightning bolts a certain direction? Do they report to you? Who gave man wisdom and put understanding in his heart? Who can tell the clouds to let go of their cargo of rain when and where it's needed?"

39-41. "Do you go hunting so that you can find enough food for the lions? Do their cubs hide in the bushes and watch you get their food? Who feeds the ravens and their young when they cry to be fed?"

God Continues

39 "Do you know where the mountain goats have their babies? Are you there when deer give birth to their young? Do you know when it's time for each one to do this? Are you there to watch and help them as their babies are born, grow up, and then leave home to be on their own?"

5-8. "Who gave the wild donkeys their love of freedom? I gave them the wasteland as their home. They laugh at the noise of the city and never hear the shout of a master. The mountains are their pasture."

9-12. "Will a wild bull agree to serve you? Is he willing to spend the night in your barn? Can you hold him with a rope and make him plow for you? Will he quietly let you put a harness on him? Can you count on him to use his great strength to help you? Can you trust him?"

13-18. "Why does the ostrich flap her wings when she can't fly? I didn't give her wisdom. So she lays her eggs on the ground, where an animal might step on them. She doesn't care for her babies as she should. But when she spreads her

short wings she can outrun a horse."

19-25. "Did you give the horse its strength and make it run and jump? He paws the ground and charges forward unafraid. He laughs at battle and war as the sword and spear glisten in the sun. When the trumpet sounds, he gets excited and is ready to go. He snorts as he smells the battle and hears the shouts of men in war."

26-30. "Did you teach the hawk to fly? Does the eagle soar at your command, or build its nest where you suggest? It lives in the mountains, and the high peaks are its home. From there it can spot food nearby or far away. Its young feast on anything that's dead, wherever it's found."

God Challenges Job

40 The Lord said to Job, "How long will you question My wisdom? What do you have to say for yourself?"

3-5. Then Job answered, "Lord, now I see how small I am. What can I say? I will cover my mouth and be quiet. I spoke up once and didn't have the right answer, then tried again and failed. So I won't try again."

6-9. Then the Lord spoke out of the storm, saying, "Stand up like a man, because I will ask some more questions, and I expect you to answer. Are you trying to make yourself look good by questioning what I do? Are you as powerful as I am? Can your voice thunder throughout the universe?"

10-14. "If so, stand up and show Me your glory. Use your power against sin. Humble the proud of the earth. Overthrow the wicked. End their violence by taking their breath away. If you can do this, I will admit that you don't need Me."

15-18. "Take a look at the elephant. I made him about the time I made man."

He eats grass like a cow, but notice how strong he is. His trunk is powerful and as thick as a small tree. His legs are like tree stumps. His bones are as strong as iron.

19-24. "Only his Maker can defeat him in a test of strength. Yet animals safely play in his presence. He can lie down on thorn bushes and wade through deep water. He finds shade among the trees. He's not afraid of a raging river, even if it's up to his mouth. Who can go to his water hole and put a ring in his nose and gently lead him away?

God Continues

41 "Can you pull in a crocodile with a fishhook and lead him along on a leash? Can you put a hook in his jaw and tie him up with a rope? Will he be humble and beg you to let him go? Will he promise to serve you? Can you make him your pet so that your children can play with him?

6-10. "Do fishermen go fishing for him? Is he easy to catch? Can you throw darts at him and hurt him? Will a spear go through his head? Try catching him with your hands, and you'll have a battle you'll never forget. To try to tame him is foolish. No one dares challenge him to a fight. Who can stand up to him?

11. "Who can confront Me and claim that I owe him something? Everything on earth belongs to Me.

12-17. "Now, what about this huge crocodile? Can you put a bridle on him as you do a horse? Can you force his jaws open with your hands to look at his teeth? His whole body is protected by layers of little shields. They're so tight that no air can get in. No one can pull them apart.

18-25. "When he snorts, his eyes light

up like rays of the morning sun. His mouth is full of power, and smoke seems to come out of his nose. His breath is hot. His neck is powerful. The scales on his body can't be moved. He's not afraid of anything. When he sticks his head out of the water and thrashes with his tail, people are terrified.

26-30. "A sword can't stop him. He's not afraid. A metal rod means nothing to him. Arrows can't make him run. Stones from a sling bounce off of him like pebbles. Clubs don't hurt him. He laughs at spears. His belly is so tough that he can drag himself through mud and stones and not be hurt.

31-34. "When he thrashes around, the water looks like a boiling pot. When he swims, he leaves a trail behind him. No other animal is so fearless. Not one can equal him. He is king over all who are proud."

Job Repents and Prospers

42 Then Job answered, "Lord, I know that You can do all things and that no one can stop You. You asked why I questioned Your wisdom. I can now see that I spoke from ignorance. I talked about things I didn't really understand.

4-6. "You said that I should listen to You, that You would question me, and that I should answer You. Before this, I knew only what others have said about You. But now I have heard You tell me about Yourself. I'm ashamed of what I said about You. I hate myself for it. Please forgive me."

7. The Lord forgave Job and then turned to his three friends: "I need to talk to the three of you. What you said to Job was not right.

8. "I want you to take seven young bulls and seven male sheep and offer them as a sacrifice to Me right here in

front of Job. I will ask him to pray for you, and then I'll forgive you too. Your explanation of why people prosper was not right. You should have listened to Job."

9. So Job's three friends did what the Lord told them to do, and the Lord answered Job's prayer and forgave them.

10-11. Then the Lord healed Job and gave him twice as much as he had before. So Job was welcomed back by his brothers and sisters and former friends, who feasted with him. They were kind to him and comforted him because of all the troubles he had gone through. Each one

gave him a piece of silver and gold.

12. So the Lord blessed the last part of Job's life even more than the first part. Soon he had thousands of sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys—twice as many as he had before.

13. He also had seven more sons and three daughters. The first daughter was Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Karen. No women were as beautiful as those girls. Job gave them the same inheritance as he gave his boys.

14-17. Job lived happily for 140 years after the Lord healed him. He was able to see his children's children, and their children, for four generations.

Psalms

INTRODUCTION: *About half of the 150 psalms were written by David around 1000 B.C. Others wrote the rest. But the whole book was inspired by God. From the psalms we learn how to talk with God and how to worship Him. We learn a little bit of history of what God has done for His people. The psalms remind us that God loves us and tell us how to love Him back. Some tell us how to confess our sins and ask for forgiveness. There are psalms that ask God to punish the wicked for all the suffering they bring on His people. Some psalms talk about the coming of Jesus and how He would be put to death. And there are psalms written for special religious holidays.*

Happiness

1 Happy is the man who doesn't listen to those who are evil or go where they go. Happy is the man who delights in God's law and thinks about what God said. He's like a tree next to a stream of water, bearing fruit even when there's no rain. Whatever he does will prosper.

4-5. The wicked are not so. They're like dust that the wind blows away. God will hold them responsible for what they have done, and they will not be part of His people.

6. The Lord watches over those who love Him, but the wicked will eventually be destroyed.

God Is King

2 Why are the nations so upset? Why do kings and rulers plan to go against the Lord, saying, "Let's attack God's people and break the ropes that make us feel guilty."

4-6. God smiles at their feeble efforts. He'll let them know that He's still in charge by showing His power. He says, "I have set My Son as king of Jerusalem; from there He will rule the world."

7-9. God said to the Messiah, "I am Your Father, and You are My Son. I will give You the whole world for Your kingdom. You will save those

who love You and destroy those who fight against You."

10-12. Kings and rulers should listen to God and serve Him. They should obey Him and be glad. Let them accept God's Son as their king. He has all the power of God. Happy are those who trust Him for protection.

A Morning Prayer

3 Lord, those who trouble me are increasing. Please help me. My enemies are out to get me. Some say that You are no longer on my side.

3-5. But, Lord, You are my shield and protector. You lift my spirit and give me courage. Whenever I need You, You always come to help me. I sleep at night, knowing that You care. I awaken in the morning, knowing that You're there.

6-7. I will not be afraid of my enemies, even if thousands of troops invade our land. I know that You will fight for me. You will save me, because You have defeated my enemies before.

8. Salvation comes from You. Please bless Your people.

An Evening Prayer

4 Lord, please listen to me and answer my prayer. Be merciful and help me.

2. I will say to those who hate me, "How long will you ruin my reputation by telling lies about me?"

3. God treasures those who love Him. He answers their prayers when they call on Him.

4-5. Don't get upset and then sin. When you go to bed, think about the way you've been acting. Decide to obey the Lord. Trust Him.

6. Many say, "Someone needs to show us what's good." Lord, show us by Your presence and bless us.

7-8. You have given me more joy than a rich harvest of grain and grapes. At night I go to sleep in peace because I know that You're watching over me.

A Prayer for Protection

5 Lord, please pay attention to me. Listen to my cry. You are my God and king. In the morning You will hear my voice. I will tell You what I need, and then wait for an answer.

4-6. You are not a God who likes evil; You hate wickedness. Those who do wrong will not be able to stand before You. You will not give eternal life to liars, violent men, or deceitful people.

7. Yet You love everyone, even me. You are merciful, so I can come to your Temple and worship You with my whole heart.

8-9. I have so many enemies. Help me know what to do. They don't tell the truth. They keep flattering me and telling me what they think I want to hear.

10. O God, pronounce them guilty. Don't let them come and flatter me. Send away those who have turned against You.

11-12. Let everyone who trusts the Lord rejoice. Let them sing songs of joy. Lord, protect those who love You. Let them be happy and praise Your name. I know that You will bless

those who do right. Your love surrounds them like a shield.

A Prayer for Help

6 Lord, please don't be upset with me over what I did. Don't continue to discipline me. Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am weak. My body and my soul ache. Please give me strength. I want to serve You, but how can I do it from the grave? How can I praise You when I'm gone?

6-7. I go to bed crying and soak my pillow. My eyes are so filled with tears that I cannot see. I'm aging quickly because of my enemies.

8-10. I wish that evil people would leave me alone. Lord, You know my pain; accept my prayer and give me the strength I need. Then my enemies will be ashamed of what they have tried to do to me.

A Prayer for Justice

7 Lord, I put my trust in You. Protect me from those who try to hurt me. They act like hungry lions ready to tear me apart.

3-5. If I have hurt anyone, if I have betrayed a friend or stolen from those who hate me, then let my enemies take my life and leave my body unburied.

6-9. Please see that justice is done. Take my place as king and rule Your people. I know You'll do what's right. Judge me and show that I have done no wrong. Please stop all this wickedness and help those who do right.

10-13. Lord, I know that You will defend those who love You. You reward the righteous and punish the wicked. If evil men don't change, You step in like a soldier, taking Your bow and arrows and Your sword. The wicked will die for what they have done.

14-16. The wicked think of many

ways to cause trouble and deceive people. But they fall into their own traps. What they have done will come back to them, and they will taste their own violence.

17. Thank You, Lord, for always doing what is right. I will sing praises to Your name.

God's Glory

8 O Lord, how wonderful is Your name on earth! Your glory can be seen in the sky. Children look at the stars in wonder and praise You. The heavens reveal Your mighty power. **3-5.** When I consider the heavens, the work of Your hands, the sun, moon, and stars, I am awed by what You have made. Why do You even consider mankind? Of what value are we to You? Yet You made us a little lower than the angels and even shared some of Your power with us.

6-9. You put us in charge of Your creation, the cattle, sheep, wild animals, birds, and fish. All these animals respect us. Lord, how wonderful and kind You are!

Thanksgiving

9 I praise You, Lord, with all my heart. I will tell of the wonderful things You have done. I will sing praises to Your name.

3-6. When our enemies attack and You come to help us, they turn and run. You answer our prayers. You are fair and just. You rebuke those who are evil, and one day You will destroy the wicked. They will come to their end and not be remembered. Their cities and monuments will be gone forever.

7-10. The Lord is king. He will rule the world with justice. Even now He is here to help those who need Him. He is like a place of safety in times of

trouble. Those who know the Lord trust Him.

11-12. So let's sing praises to the Lord. Tell everyone what He has done for us. God never forgets how His people have suffered. He hears their cries and comes to help them.

13-14. Lord, my enemies are attacking us. Please help me before I am killed. I want to come back to Jerusalem to sing your praises and tell the people how You have saved me.

15-18. The wicked dig a pit for others, only to fall in themselves. Lord, You are fair and righteous. The wicked set their own trap by what they do. One day they will be no more. But the needy will not be forgotten. The hope of the poor will always be in You.

19-20. Lord, don't let the wicked win. Bring judgment against them. May they learn to respect You. Let them see that they're not as great as they think.

Only God Can Help

10 Lord, sometimes You seem so far away. Where are You hiding when I need You?

2-6. The wicked take advantage of the poor and feel good about it. They set traps for the innocent and brag about it. They think that they'll always prosper and that Your judgments will never come. They say to themselves, "Nothing bad will happen to us. We'll never see days of trouble."

7-11. So they lie and curse and kill innocent people. They're like lions who pounce on their victims, then drag them into the bush to eat them. Their victims don't have a chance. The wicked say, "God doesn't care. He just closes His eyes and looks the other way."

12-14. O Lord, when will You punish the wicked? How can they say, "God doesn't care what we do"? I know differently. I know that You care. You see

how the poor are suffering, and You will come to help them. They depend on You, Lord, and know that You're the only one who can save them.

15-16. Stop the wicked, Lord. Call them to account for their evil. Let them taste what suffering is. You're the rightful king and always will be. One day the wicked will be gone forever.

17-18. In the meantime, Lord, please listen to the prayers of Your people. Give us hope and courage. Protect the fatherless and the helpless. Then the wicked will finally stop terrorizing our people.

Confidence in God

11 Lord, I put my confidence in You. Why do You tell me to run and hide in the mountains? Evil men have bows and arrows ready to attack us. We have to trust You. What else can we do when everything seems to be falling apart?

4-5. We should look to the Lord. He is still on His throne. He reads the hearts of people everywhere. He tests the faith of those who are good. He hates pride and arrogance and what the wicked do to innocent people.

6. Someday the Lord will punish the wicked and destroy them as He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. They will turn to dust, and the wind will blow them away.

7. The Lord does what is right and loves justice. One day His people will see Him face-to-face.

A Prayer for Help

12 Help me, Lord. All the good people seem to be gone. Hardly an honest person is left. It seems that I can't trust anyone anymore. People lie to me or try to deceive me by flattery.

3-4. O Lord, close the mouths of liars

who brag, "With our tongues we get what we want. We can say whatever we wish, whether it's true or not. No one can tell us what to do."

5. God replies, "Because the wicked oppress the poor and take advantage of the helpless, I will punish the wicked, but I will save the righteous."

6-7. I trust the Lord. His words are genuine. They're like gold and silver purified seven times. The Lord will protect us and keep us safe. He will preserve us forever.

8. In the meantime, the wicked strut around as if they owned the world. People love what is bad and delight in what is evil.

God's Mercy

13 How much longer, Lord, will You forget about me? It seems as if You're looking the other way. How long do I have to struggle in my heart to know whether or not You will help me against my enemies?

3-4. Please answer me, Lord, or I will die. My enemies will kill me. Then they will say, "We finally got rid of him," and they will celebrate my death.

5-6. Lord, no matter what happens, I will trust Your mercy. My heart rejoices because You saved me. I break out in singing when I think of how good You have been to me.

Foolish People

14 Only fools will say, "There is no God." They say it because they don't want to be held responsible for what they're doing. No one is perfectly good, but to say there is no God is foolish.

2-3. God looks down from heaven to see if anyone understands what it means to be good, if anyone wants to please Him. But everyone seems to be doing his own thing. Not one

seems to do good, not even one.

4-5. Doesn't anyone know what's right? Why do people keep hurting each other? Why don't they turn to the Lord? Many are afraid because they know that the Lord is with those who do right. He welcomes them into His presence.

6-7. Wicked people take advantage of the poor, but the Lord will rescue them. Oh, that salvation would come to Israel, and that God would return prosperity to Israel! Then His people would sing and be glad.

God's People

15 Lord, who can live with You forever in heaven? Those who are sincere and honest, those who don't lie, backbite, or cheat.

4-5. They despise wickedness but love goodness. They don't take advantage of others or accept bribes. They keep promises even to their own hurt. They don't testify against the innocent. Someday they will live with You forever.

Hope

16 Lord, please protect me; I put my trust in You. From the bottom of my heart I say, "You are my God. I have no goodness without You."

3-4. God loves to be with His people. Those who forsake Him and worship idols bring troubles on themselves. I will not do that.

5-7. Lord, You are my inheritance and my future. You have brought me into pleasant places. How good You have been to me! I praise You for Your guidance. Even at night, You are there.

8-9. I have always put You first in my life. Because You are beside me, I cannot be shaken. I am glad, and my heart rejoices. My hope is secure in You.

10-11. You will not leave me in the grave forever, nor will You let Your Son's body decay. You show me the path to heaven. In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forever.

Confidence in God

17 I ask for justice, Lord. Listen to my heartfelt cry for help. Be my judge, because You know what is right. You have tested me day and night and found in me no desire to be dishonest. I will cling to Your word and not walk in the ways of the ungodly. Hold on to me so that I won't slip and fall.

6-8. Lord, I know that You will answer me, so please listen to my prayer. Show me Your love again. Take care of me as You would Your own eyes. Hide me under Your wings as a mother hen hides her little chicks.

9-12. Protect me from my enemies who surround me. They're selfish and have no pity. They crouch like lions waiting to kill, and then tear their prey to pieces.

13-14. O Lord, please rescue me. Confront them and then throw them down. Save me with Your word, which is more powerful than a sword. My enemies have their reward in this life. They live in luxury and never think about heaven. They have plenty of food, many children, and lots of money.

15. But I have put my confidence in You. I know that after I die I will live again; I will be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness and see You face to face.

A Song of Victory

18 Lord, I love You. You are my strength, my defender, and my Savior.

2-3. The Lord is my rock of safety, my fortress, my deliverer. He is my shield

and my defense. I will call on the Lord, and He will help me. He will save me from my enemies. Praise Him forever.

4-8. In battle death surrounded me; it looked me in the face. In fear I called to the Lord for help, and He heard me. Then the earth trembled and the mountains shook. Smoke and fire seemed to come from God's mouth.

9-13. He opened the sky and rode on the storm clouds. He came down on the wings of the wind. Darkness was His covering. He filled the clouds with fire and spoke from heaven with claps of thunder. Hailstones and lightning filled the sky.

14-17. He shot His arrows and scattered my enemies. He opened the floodgates of heaven and filled the earth with water. He pulled me out of the whirlpool of death and saved me from those who hated me, who were too strong for me.

18-24. My enemies attacked, sure of victory. But the Lord stepped in. He delivered me because He delighted in me. He rewarded me because I have walked in His ways; I have not turned from His commandments but have kept myself from evil. Therefore He hears my prayers and blesses me because of the cleanness of my heart.

25-27. Lord, You are faithful to those who are faithful, and good to those who love You. But You are against those who are devious. You save the humble and bring down the proud.

28-29. Lord, You brighten every day. With Your help I can go to battle and scale the walls of my enemies.

30-34. The way of the Lord is perfect. The word of the Lord is pure. He is a shield to those who trust Him. The Lord is my rock and my God. He strengthens me and makes my path safe. He makes me as sure-footed as a deer on the mountains. He helps me

train for battle so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

35-39. Lord, You are my salvation. You give me victory in battle. You have been gentle with me and made me great. You kept my feet from slipping. I pursued my enemies and overtook them. They fell under my feet and never attacked us again. You gave us the strength to do it.

40-45. You made my enemies turn and run. They cried to their gods, but there was no answer. They even called on You, but You gave me the victory. You made me a leader among nations. People I don't even know now serve me. When foreign armies see me, they lose their courage and come trembling out of their strongholds.

46-48. The Lord lives! Praise His name! He is the rock of my defense and the God of my salvation. Let Him be exalted forever. He has given me the victory and has helped me subdue nations. He saved me from my enemies and rescued me from the hands of violent men.

49-50. I thank You, Lord, and will praise Your name in the presence of other nations. You have given me great victories; You have shown mercy to your son David.

God's Glory in Nature

19 The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky shows His handiwork. Day after day they speak to us of God's love and wisdom. There is no place where their message is not heard. Every morning the sun comes up and goes from one end of the sky to the other.

7-9. The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul. The word of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The commandments of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The

judgments of the Lord are fair and reveal His love.

10-11. His words are of more value than gold, even of fine gold, and are sweeter than honey. His commandments guide me, and keeping them brings great reward.

12-14. Who can really understand himself or see his own faults? Keep me from sins of ignorance, Lord, from being stubborn and presumptuous. Don't let those sins control me. Help me to be innocent. Let the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be acceptable to You, Lord. You are my strength and my Redeemer.

A Prayer for the King

20 May the Lord help you in trouble. May He defend you and send you help from His sanctuary. May He strengthen your hands. May He remember what you have done for others and accept the offerings that you bring. May He give you the desires of your heart. We praise the Lord for your victories. May He grant all your requests.

6-7. We know that the Lord will save His chosen king. He will answer his prayers and give him wisdom and strength. Those who trust in chariots and horses will fall. But we will trust in the Lord our God.

8-9. As we march forward, our enemies have fallen, but we stand firm. Save the king! May the Lord always answer when we call.

Rejoicing in Victory

21 Lord, Your chosen king rejoices. You have saved him in battle and given him victory. You have given him his heart's desire and greatly blessed him. You have placed a crown of gold on his head.

4-7. He asked for a long life, and You

gave it to him, even promising him life forever. You have given him glory and honor. Your blessings never end. But most of all, You have made him happy in Your presence. The king trusts the Lord. Because of God's love, the king shall not be shaken.

8-12. Lord, You will triumph over Your enemies. When You appear, Your enemies will be overcome by Your glory and be destroyed. Not one of their wicked descendants will survive. They may plot against You, but they will not succeed. You aim Your arrows at their faces, and Your enemies turn and run.

13. We praise You, Lord, for Your great strength. We will sing and praise Your greatness forever.

David Predicts Jesus' Suffering

22 My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far away? Haven't You heard my moaning? During the day and at night I cry out, asking for help, but there is no answer.

3-5. Yet I know You are holy. Our ancestors trusted You, and You delivered them. They cried out for help and You saved them. You never disappointed them.

6-8. But I feel as worthless as a worm. People ridicule me and laugh. They stick out their tongues and shake their heads, saying, "If you trust God so much, why doesn't He come and help you? If He loves you so much, why doesn't He deliver you?"

9-11. God, You are the one who took me out of the womb and brought me into the world. You have taught me to love You since I was a child. My mother trusted me to Your care before I was born. You have been my God. Please don't leave me now. I'm in deep trouble, and no one comes to help.

12-15. Men as strong as bulls come at me like hungry lions. My strength melts away. My arms hang limp. My throat is dry, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. I feel like I'm dying.

16-18. My enemies surround me like a pack of wild dogs. They crucify me and pierce my hands and feet. You can almost count my bones. People come and stare at me. They strip me naked and gamble for my robe.

19-21. Lord, don't be so far away. You are my strength. Please help me. Don't let me die. Deliver me from these mad dogs, from the lion's mouth and from the horns of these wild bulls. I know that You have heard my prayer and will answer me.

22-23. I will tell my people all about You. I will honor Your name. Praise Him, all you people! Honor Him, you sons of Jacob! Worship Him who loves you!

24-25. He has not forsaken His suffering Son. He has not turned His face away from Him, but has heard His cry for help. Lord, I will praise You in front of the congregation for what You have done. I will do what I have promised.

26-27. The time will come when the poor will no longer be hungry. Those who look to the Lord will praise Him. People from every nation will turn to God and worship Him.

28-31. This world is part of the Lord's kingdom. The powerful will bow before Him. Everyone will worship Him. People who haven't yet been born will honor Him. They will speak to each other about Him and His saving deeds. They will declare His righteousness. They will say, "God is the one who has done all this!"

The Good Shepherd

23 The Lord is my shepherd. He takes care of me. He leads me to green meadows

and quiet waters. He strengthens my soul. He helps me do what is right.

4. Even when I go through a dark valley facing death, I will not be afraid. I know that You are with me. Your shepherd's rod comforts me.

5. Your presence is like a banquet even if I'm surrounded by my enemies. You anoint me with oil. My heart overflows with gratitude.

6. Your goodness and mercy will be with me all my life. And someday I will live in Your house forever.

The King Is Coming

24 The earth is the Lord's and everything in it. He created the world and brought dry land out of the midst of water.

3-6. Who has a right to go to God's house in heaven and stand in His presence? Those who are innocent and pure in heart; those who don't worship other gods or make promises in their name. The Lord will bless those who do right, those who look to the God of Jacob for salvation and long to see His face.

7-10. Open up, you heavenly gates! Open up, you everlasting doors! The King is coming in! Who is this King? The Lord strong and mighty in battle. He is the King! Open up, you heavenly gates! Open up, you everlasting doors! The King of glory is coming in! Who is this King? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory!

A Prayer for Guidance

25 To You, Lord, do I lift up my heart. I trust You. Don't let me be disgraced or let my enemies win. Don't let those who put their hope in You be ashamed. Let our enemies be ashamed for what they are doing to us.

4-7. Show me Your ways, O Lord.

Teach me which way to go. Lead me in Your truth and be my teacher. You are the God of my salvation. Every day I depend on You. Remember the past, O Lord, how kind You have been? But please don't remember my sins. Be merciful to me, for You are a good and loving God.

8-11. The Lord is good. He will teach sinners the way they should go. He will guide the humble and help them do right. All His ways are mercy and truth. He leads those who keep His commandments and listen to His voice. For your name's sake, Lord, forgive my sins, for they are great.

12-14. Who worships the Lord? Those who respect Him and do what He wants them to do. They and their children will inherit the earth. God tells His secrets to those who love Him. He will keep the agreement He made with them.

15-20. My eyes are always on the Lord. He will save me. Have mercy on me, Lord. Come and help me, because I am in trouble. Forgive my sins. Look at all my enemies; see how they hate me! Deliver me, Lord; don't let me be disgraced, for I trust You.

21-22. I'm innocent of evil, Lord. My hope is in You. Please save Your people and deliver us from our troubles!

The Prayer of a Good Man

26 Stand up for me, Lord. I have tried to do what's right. I have trusted You. Examine my heart. I know that You love me. I have tried to walk in Your truth.

4-7. I don't spend time with liars or those who justify their evil. I hate their sins and refuse to be with them. I am innocent of wickedness and have come to worship You. I will sing Your praises and with thanksgiving tell of the wonderful things You have done.

8-10. I love to come to Your sanctuary, because You are there. Don't count me in with the wicked. They kill, twist justice, and do anything for money.

11-12. But I want to please You, Lord. Be merciful to me and help me. I'm on solid ground with You. I will praise You in front of all Your people.

A Song of Faith

27 The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear?

The Lord is my strength. Of whom shall I be afraid? When my enemies try to overpower me, they will fall. If a whole army surrounds me, I will not be afraid. If the nations declare war on us, I will trust You.

4. The one thing I want is to stay close to the Lord all my life. I want to see the beauty of His character and talk with Him in His heavenly home.

5-6. In the time of trouble He will protect me. He will hide me in His tent or set me high on a rock out of the reach of my enemies. Then I will hold my head high and go to His house with sacrifices and shouts of joy. I will sing songs of thanksgiving and praise to Him.

7-10. Hear my prayer, O Lord. When I cry to You for help, please answer me. When You tell me to seek Your face, I will. Don't hide from me, Lord. Don't turn away from me. You have always been my help; don't leave me. You are the God of my salvation. Even if my parents abandon me, You will always love and care for me.

11-13. Teach me what to do, Lord, and lead me along safe paths. My enemies are after me. Don't turn me over to them. They have lied about me and are cruel. I would have lost heart, except for faith in You. I know I will see the blessings of God on His people.

14. Wait on the Lord; be of good

courage. He will give you strength; wait, I say, on the Lord.

The Joy of Answered Prayer

28 Lord, You are my rock; please answer me as I lift my hands toward Your heavenly sanctuary. If You don't hear my prayers, I might as well die. So please hear me. I need Your help.

3-4. Don't destroy me with the wicked, with those who talk peace but have hatred in their hearts. They need to reap the results of their evil thoughts and wicked actions.

5-6. They don't understand what God has done, neither do they love Him. They will be destroyed and will not receive eternal life. I will praise the Lord because He has heard my prayer and answered me.

7-8. The Lord is my strength and shield. I trust Him with my whole heart. Therefore, I am full of joy and will praise Him in song. The Lord protects His people and gives victory to His chosen king.

9. Save Your people, Lord, and bless those who are Yours. Be their shepherd and carry them as lambs in Your arms forever.

God's Voice

29 Praise the Lord, you powerful angels; lift up His glory and strength. Praise His holy name, and worship Him in the majesty of holiness.

3-9. The voice of God thunders across the oceans, powerful and full of majesty. His voice snaps the huge trees of Lebanon. The hills dance like calves, and the mountains jump like young bulls. His voice makes lightning flash and deserts quiver. Huge oaks are stripped of their leaves. In His Temple people say, "Glory to God!"

10-11. God commands, and the floods listen. He will strengthen His people and give them peace.

A Thanksgiving Prayer

30 I praise You, Lord, because You have saved me. You have kept my enemies from laughing at me. I cried to You for help; You healed me. I almost died, but You snatched me from the grave and restored my life.

4-5. Sing to the Lord! Praise His name! Remember what He has done for you and give thanks. His discipline is short, but His goodness toward us is forever. Tears might come in the night, but gladness will come in the morning.

6-10. In my prosperity I said, "I will not fail." Then I remembered that it was You, O God, who gave me the strength to stand like a mountain. But when You looked the other way, I was afraid. I called out, "Lord! What good is it for me to die? My ashes can't praise You or declare Your truth! Hear me, Lord! Please help me!"

11-12. You did hear me and turned my fear into joy. You took my sorrow and turned it into gladness. Lord, I will praise You for what You have done. You are my God; I will thank You forever.

In Times of Trouble

31 In You, Lord, do I put my trust. Don't let me be ashamed. Listen to my plea and rescue me. Be an overhanging rock for me, a mountain fortress where I can hide. Guide me as You promised. Keep me from falling into the trap of my enemies. You are my protection. I put my life into Your hands. Save me, O Lord of truth.

6-8. I hate it when people worship

idols. I will hold on to You, Lord, and rejoice in Your love for me. You saw how troubled I was; You kept my enemies from capturing me. You brought me safely home and set my feet back in Israel.

9-13. Be merciful to me, Lord; my eyes are weak from crying. I'm totally exhausted. My life is wasting away; my strength is failing. I feel like my bones can't hold me up. My enemies hate me; my neighbors look down on me. I feel like a forgotten dead man. Terror surrounds me, and my enemies plot to kill me.

14-18. But I trust You, Lord. You will always be my God. My life is in Your hands; deliver me from my enemies. Be merciful and save me. Don't let me be disgraced. Let the wicked be ashamed. May their lying lips be silenced in the grave because of all the bad things they've said against the righteous.

19-20. How great is Your goodness to those who love and trust You. You will hide them in the shelter of Your presence and protect them from the plots of their enemies. You will save them from the accusations of those who hate them.

21-22. Praise the Lord for His wonderful kindness! I thought that I was trapped, and that the Lord had closed His eyes and didn't see me. But He heard my cries and came and rescued me.

23-24. Love the Lord, all you people. He loves those who are faithful. He lets the proud reap the consequences of their wickedness. Be full of courage for the Lord, and He will give you strength. Take heart, all you who hope in Him.

The Joy of Forgiveness

32 Happy are those whose sins are forgiven, whose wrongs are not held against them. Happy are those who are accepted by the Lord as if they had never done anything wrong.

3-5. When I refused to admit my sin, it bothered me so much that I got sick. Day and night I was under conviction and was losing strength. Then I confessed my sin and asked the Lord to forgive me. He did; He forgave me and took away my guilt.

6-7. Everyone should pray to You, Lord, while they can, before troubles come in like a flood. Lord, You are my hiding place. You protect me and then surround me with songs of victory.

8-9. You said, "I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go. I will keep My eye on you." Lord, help me not to be like a horse or a mule who must be harnessed with a bit and bridle to be brought to You.

10-11. The wicked will have many sorrows, but those who trust the Lord are surrounded by His mercy. So be happy in the Lord! He loves you! Sing and shout for joy, all you who are honest in heart!

The God of Creation

33 Rejoice in the Lord, you who do what is right because you love Him. Play the harp and sing songs of thanksgiving to God. Sing new songs to Him and shout for joy!

4-7. The words of God are true, and whatever He does is right. He loves righteousness and justice. The earth is filled with His goodness. By His word were the heavens made; the sun, moon, and stars by the breath of His mouth. He gathered the water

together in the oceans and made them stay in one place.

8-9. Let the people stand in awe of the Lord. He spoke, and it was done. He commanded, and the world stood fast.

10-11. The Lord watches over nations and upsets their plans. No one can change His mind; His purposes are the same for all generations.

12-15. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people who belong to Him. He looks down from heaven and sees all who live on earth. He created us and understands everything we do.

16-17. No king is saved by the size of his army. No matter how many horses and chariots he has, he can't win by his own strength alone.

18-21. The Lord's eye is on those who respect and honor Him, who put their hope in His mercy. He delivers them from death and preserves them in times of famine. We will wait on the Lord. He is our help and shield. Our hearts rejoice because we trust in His name.

22. O Lord, let your mercy rest upon us as we place our hope in You.

Praising God

34 I will thank the Lord and never stop praising Him. I will tell what He has done. The humble will hear and be glad. Magnify the Lord with me. Come, let us exalt His name together.

4-7. I prayed to the Lord, and He answered me. He took away my fear. Those who go to Him for help are happy; their faces are radiant. I cried for help, and the Lord heard me and saved me. God's angels camp around those who love the Lord, and deliver them from trouble.

8-10. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Happy are those who put their

trust in Him. Those who do have everything their hearts need. Even lions grow hungry and weak. But those who listen to the Lord will not lack any good thing.

11-14. Come, my young friends. Listen to me. I will tell you how to respect the Lord. Do you want to be happy and enjoy life? Then don't tell lies. Turn away from evil, and do good. Look for peace and put your whole heart into being kind.

15-17. The Lord watches over those who do right. He listens to their cry. But He will not overlook the behavior of those who do evil. The righteous call on the Lord. He hears and answers. He helps them out of all their troubles.

18-20. The Lord is especially close to the brokenhearted. He helps those whose spirits have been crushed. A good man may have lots of troubles, but the Lord helps him out of all of them. He will guard him and keep him safe.

21-22. Wickedness kills people. Those who hate what's right will be held guilty. But the Lord will save His people. No one who loves and trusts Him will be turned away.

A Prayer for Help

35 Lord, please fight against those who fight against me. Take Your shield, Your bow and arrows, and stop those who are chasing me. Tell me that You will save me.

4-8. Confuse those who seek my life. Turn them back and scatter them in the wind. May their road be dark and slippery, and may Your angels chase them back home. They attacked without reason and tried to kill me. May they fall into their own pit and be destroyed.

9-10. Lord, I will rejoice in Your salvation. I will say, "Who is like You,

Lord? You save the weak from the strong and the poor from those who plunder them."

11-14. People accuse me of things I know nothing about. They repay me evil for good. Yet when they were sick, I visited them. I prayed for their recovery. I cared for them as I care about my friends and brothers. When they hurt, I hurt with them as if they were my own parents.

15-18. But when I got sick, they were glad; they got together and laughed. They insulted me; they attacked my faith and made fun of me. Lord, how much longer will You look on and do nothing? Please rescue me from these people who act like lions. I will thank You and praise You in front of all the people.

19-21. Lord, don't let my enemies rejoice over me. They wink at each other and make fun of me. They think up lies, accusing me of things I have never done.

22-26. But You know better. So speak up for me, Lord. Don't leave me alone! Come to my defense. Plead my case; vindicate me, O Lord. Don't let my enemies say, "Now we've got him!" May those who are rejoicing over my sufferings be shown to be wrong. May they be confused and brought to shame when they testify against me.

27-28. May those who stand up for me be glad and praise Your name. May they say, "Praise the Lord! Let Him be magnified, for He loves to see His people prosper." I will tell everyone of Your justice and goodness. I will praise You all day long for what You have done for me.

God's Goodness

36 Sin is in the hearts of the wicked because they don't love God. In their eyes

there's nothing wrong with what they're doing. They lie and cheat. At night they lie in bed thinking of all the evil they're going to do the next day because they enjoy it.

5-6. Lord, in spite of this, Your mercy is as high as the heavens and Your faithfulness as high as the clouds. Your righteousness is like the majestic mountains, and Your justice as deep as the ocean.

7-8. How wonderful is Your love for us, O Lord! That's why we put our trust in You and feel as secure as chicks under their mother's wings. You feed us from Your table of goodness and let us drink from Your river of heavenly pleasures.

9-10. You are the source of all life. When we walk in Your light, we see what is true. Continue to be merciful to those who love You and do right.

11-12. Don't let the proud attack me, or the wicked drive me away. Those who do evil have been overcome and will not rise up to do evil again.

The Reward of the Righteous

37 Don't worry because of evil people. They will soon die like cut grass, like plants that wither in times of drought.

3-6. Trust in the Lord and do good. Feed on His love and faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your ways to Him; trust Him, and He'll take care of you. He will make your goodness shine as the sun.

7-11. Rest in the Lord and be patient, for He will do things in His own time. Don't worry when the wicked prosper. Don't fret over it, because that only leads to trouble. One day all the wicked will be gone. But those who wait on the Lord will inherit the earth.

12-14. The wicked continue to plot against those who are good. They grind their teeth at them in anger. But the Lord knows that their day is coming.

15. The wicked take their swords and prepare to attack; they kill the poor and the helpless. But one day the Lord will turn their swords against them and snap their bows in two.

16-19. It is better to have less with God's approval than to have a lot without Him. The Lord will destroy the wicked, but He will help those who do right. The Lord will watch over the righteous; their inheritance is sure. They will not give up when trouble comes, for the Lord will provide.

20-22. The wicked will perish, and the enemies of the Lord will vanish like flowers in the field. They will disappear like smoke. The wicked borrow money with no intention of paying it back. But good people are generous and merciful; they will inherit the earth. Those who are evil will be cut off.

23-26. The steps of a good man are guided by the Lord. Though he stumbles, the Lord will hold him up. I once was young and now I'm old, but I have never seen the righteous forsaken nor his descendants having to beg for food. Good people are always helping others, and their children are a blessing to everyone.

27-31. Turn from evil and do good, and the Lord will give you eternal life. God will not abandon His people, but the wicked will be gone. The righteous will inherit the earth. Their mouths are full of wisdom and their decisions are fair. The word of God is in their hearts.

32-33. The wicked watch the righteous and make plans to kill them. But the Lord will not let this happen. He will not condemn those who are good.

34. Wait on the Lord and be guided by His commandments. One day you will inherit the earth and see the wicked destroyed.

35-37. I saw a wicked man having great power and looking as strong as a big tree. Yet, after he died, no one wanted to remember him. People love to remember a good man. The future of that man is peace, and he will never be forgotten.

38-40. The wicked will be destroyed, and their future will end. But salvation comes to the righteous. The Lord is their strength in time of trouble. He will help them and deliver them; He will save them because they trust Him.

Prayer in Times of Rebuke

38 Lord, don't discipline me when I've displeased You. Your corrections hurt like arrows when Your hand comes down on me. Your rebuke has left me weak; there's no fight left in me. It's all because of my sin.

4-8. My guilt flows over my head and weighs me down like a heavy burden. My whole body feels like it's covered with sores. How dumb of me to keep on sinning! I walk around bent over and sad. My whole body aches, and the pain never stops. I'm totally exhausted and broken.

9-11. Lord, all I need is You. My crying is not hidden from You. My heart pounds, and my strength is gone. My eyes have lost their sparkle. My friends avoid me; even my relatives stay away from me.

12-14. Those who want to kill me talk about it openly. Every day they plot against me. The only thing I can do is act like I'm deaf. When they talk to me, I say nothing, because I don't know how to respond.

15-16. But I trust You, Lord, because

You are my only hope, and I know that You hear me. Don't let my foot slip; don't let my enemies capture me and then brag about it.

17-18. I can't hold on much longer, Lord. I confess my guilt. I'm in anguish over my sin. It really hurts me to have hurt You.

19-20. My enemies are healthy and strong. There are many who hate me. They pay back evil for good, and are against me because I try to do what's right.

21-22. So don't leave me, Lord. Don't go away; stay by my side. Hurry and help me, Lord, for You are my salvation.

Life Is Short

39 I said, "I will give my life to the Lord and guard my ways. I will not sin with my tongue. I will be careful what I say when the wicked are nearby."

2-3. So I kept quiet and held my peace; I didn't even say anything good. But it didn't work. Soon I felt angry at what the wicked were doing, and the more I thought about it, the worse my anger became. So I said,

4-5. "Lord, let me know how much longer I have to live, so I can count the days that are left. My age is nothing to You. Life is like a vapor; it's here today and gone tomorrow."

6-7. "Even the strongest man has to die sometime. He hurries here and there, doing this or that, making lots of money, and then doesn't even know who will spend it. So what's the use? My hope is in You."

8-10. "Lord, please forgive my sins and don't let people make fun of me. I'll keep quiet and won't complain anymore, no matter what You do. I trust You, Lord. But please don't discipline me any longer. I feel like I'm about to die."

11. "When You discipline us, it is because of our sins. You can make what a man has melt away like a moth."

12-13. "Lord, hear my prayer. Listen to my cry and notice my tears. I'm just a pilgrim in this world of sin. Please let up on me so that I can be happy again before I die."

Prayer and Praise

40 I waited patiently for the Lord to help me. He heard my cry and pulled me out of a pit of trouble. He set me high on a rock and steadied my steps. He put a new song in my heart. Praise the Lord! Those who see it will also trust the Lord. Happy are those who trust the Lord, who neither admire the proud nor listen to those who tell lies.

5. O Lord, my God, You have done so many wonderful things. You have been kind to us so many times that I cannot count them all.

6-8. When the Messiah comes, He will say, "Father, I know You don't want animal sacrifices and offerings, because they do not take away sin. You have opened My ears, and I am listening. In Your Book it is written of Me: 'I delight to do Your will, O God, and Your law is written on My heart.'"

9-10. "I have told the good news of salvation in the great meeting of Your people. My lips are not silent, Lord. I have not kept Your goodness to myself, but have declared Your faithfulness and salvation. I have not kept Your love and truth from the people."

11-13. Lord, be merciful to me. May Your love and truth preserve me. I'm surrounded by so much wickedness. Even my own sins discourage me so that I can't see Your love and grace. I have more sins than hairs on my head. When I think about them all, I lose courage. Lord, hurry and help me.

14-15. Lord, shame and disgrace those who are trying to kill me. Let those who want to hurt me, who say, "Aha, let's get him!" be driven back.

16-17. May all those who look to You for help be glad. May those who are thankful for Your salvation praise You and say, "The Lord is great!" I am weak and poor, but I know that You haven't forgotten me, Lord. You are my helper and my Savior.

Prayer of a Sick Man

41 Happy is the man who helps the poor. When trouble comes, the Lord will help him. The Lord will protect him and save his life. He will bless him and not let his enemies take him. He will give him strength and restore him when he is sick.

4-6. Lord, be merciful to me. Forgive my sins and heal me. My enemies speak evil of me, saying, "When will he die, so that his name will be forgotten?" They come and pretend to be my friends, but pick up all the gossip about me and then spread it everywhere.

7-9. Those who hate me whisper, "His secret sins are the reason that he's so sick." It won't be long until he dies." Even my closest friend, whom I trusted, has turned against me.

10-11. Lord, be merciful to me and heal me so that I can show them that You are pleased with me. My enemies will not triumph over me or rejoice over my death.

12-13. Then they will know that You uphold my innocence. Someday I will see Your face and be with You forever. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who has always existed and will always be. Amen and amen.

Longing for God

42 As the deer longs for cool water, so I long for You, Lord. My heart thirsts for the living God. When can I be with You forever? I cry day and night for Your presence. My enemies keep saying, "Where is your God?"

4-5. My heart aches when I think of how I used to lead people to Your Temple, singing praises all the way. What a spiritual feast we had! But why am I so sad now? My hope is in the Lord. I will keep praising You no matter how discouraged I feel, because You are my Savior.

6-7. I still feel sad no matter where I am, on the other side of Jordan or in the mountains. It feels as if huge waves are pounding on me.

8-9. In the daytime I see evidence of Your presence. At night Your love for me fills the air like a song. Yet my prayers are the same: "Lord, have You forgotten me? Why am I so sad? Is it because of my enemies?"

10-11. Each time I hear my enemies say, "Where is your God now that you need Him?" It's like being stabbed. Why do I feel so depressed? Lord, I must trust You, no matter how I feel. You are my Savior and my God.

A Prayer for Deliverance

43 Defend me, O Lord; argue my case against the wicked. Deliver me from lying and deceitful men. You are my strength, but sometimes I feel that You have forsaken me. Why am I depressed because of what my enemies say about me?

3. Lord, please send Your light and truth to guide me. Take me to Your sanctuary, to Your holy mountain where You live.

4. I will go to the Lord's house to meet Him. He is the source of my happi-

ness. I will praise Him on my harp and sing, "My God, how great You are!"

5. Why then am I still so depressed? What is causing this? I will put my hope in God and trust Him no matter how I feel. I will praise His name, for He is my Savior and my God.

A Prayer for Protection

44 Lord, we have listened to what our fathers told us about what You did for them. They told how You brought them into this land and drove out the heathen. It was not by the power of their own swords that they conquered the land, but by Your mighty power and Your love for them.

4-8. You are my king and my God! Your commands defeated our attackers. In Your name we overcame them. I will not trust my bow and sword to save me. You gave us the victory. So we will talk about what You have done and praise You forever.

9-11. But now that we need You again, it feels as if You've forsaken us. You no longer seem to go out with our troops. We have had to retreat. Our enemies have overrun our camps and taken our goods. Many of our men have been killed, and the rest are scattered.

12-16. We feel as if You've sold us for next to nothing, and it's not been to Your glory. We've been shamed; other nations laugh at us. I've been disgraced by my enemies. And at home people laugh at my defeat.

17-19. Lord, I can't understand why You let this happen. We haven't forgotten You or turned away from You. We haven't been disloyal to You. Yet You let our enemies crush us and hunt us down like wild animals. Death hangs over us like a shadow.

20-22. If we had forgotten You or worshiped other gods, I could understand.

You would have known if we had, because You know everything. Yet we are being slaughtered like sheep.

23-26. Lord, please wake up! Don't cast us aside! Why are You hiding from us? Why are You letting Your people suffer? We feel like You've thrown us to the ground and pushed our faces in the mud. Please come to our rescue, and in Your mercy, save us.

A Royal Wedding

45 My heart is moved as I compose a song for the wedding of my son, the future king. Words flow from my lips as from the point of a pen.

2-4. But first let me sing about my heavenly King. Lord, You are wonderful, more handsome than anyone. Your heart and lips are full of grace. Therefore, God has made You our king forever. Put on Your sword, Lord, and show us Your majesty. Fight for truth and justice. Show us the mighty deeds You can do.

5-7. Your arrows are sharp; they go straight to the heart and pierce any armor. You can make whole nations bow at Your feet. Lord, Your throne will last forever. You rule with righteousness and justice. You love good and hate evil. That's why God has gladly anointed You as our king.

8-9. My son, your clothes are perfumed and ready for the wedding. I hear music coming from the palace. Daughters of kings from other nations are among the bridesmaids. At your right hand stands the queen dressed in the finest gown, woven with threads of gold.

10-12. Listen to me, daughter-to-be, and pay attention to what I have to say. You're leaving your family to marry the future king. He loves you

and is struck with your beauty. People from everywhere come with gifts; even the wealthy come to meet you and seek your favor.

13-15. How beautiful the bride looks standing by the palace; her gown is woven with gold. She is being led to the one she loves. Her bridesmaids follow behind her as she goes to meet her king. They are radiant with joy as they enter the palace.

16. And you, my son, will have sons of your own. They will share your throne and serve as princes throughout the land.

17. As long as I live, I will write songs and sing praises to my heavenly King, because I want my people to remember Him for all generations. One day people from every nation will praise Him forever.

God Is Our Refuge

46 God is our refuge and strength, our helper in times of trouble. Therefore we will not be afraid, though the earth shakes and mountains slide into the sea, though the oceans roar and the mountains tremble.

4-5. From God's city comes a stream called the river of life, which makes us glad. It begins at His sanctuary and flows through the Holy City, where God lives. God is also here. He loves Jerusalem and will not let her be shaken. He protects her anew at the break of each day.

6-9. When God speaks, nations crumble and the earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge. Look at the amazing things that the Lord has done on earth. He has stopped wars, broken the bent bow, cut the spear in two, and destroyed chariots with fire.

10-11. He says, "Be still and know that

I am God. My name will be exalted among the nations. I will take My place as king." Yes, the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Praise to God, Our King

47 Clap your hands and shout for joy! Sing to the Lord! How awesome and mighty God is! He is king over all the earth. He will subdue our enemies and put the nations under His feet. He chose the Promised Land as our inheritance because He loves us.

5-8. As the Lord ascends His throne, let us shout for joy! Blow the trumpets! Sing praises to our God, to our mighty king. He is king over all the earth, ruling from His royal throne.

9. One day the rulers of nations will join the people of God in praising the Lord. All the kings of the earth belong to Him. He is to be praised and honored everywhere.

The City of God

48 The Lord is great and most worthy to be praised. Praise Him in Jerusalem; praise Him on His holy mountain. Mount Zion is beautiful, a joy to see. It is God's mountain, a fitting place for our great king.

3-6. The Lord is with us; He is our refuge. Our enemies joined forces to attack Mount Zion. But when they saw its height, they turned and ran. Fear overcame them when they sensed the presence of God.

7-8. Lord, You scattered them as a mighty wind scatters ships at sea. We have heard what You did in the past, and now we see it with our own eyes. Jerusalem is the city of our God. He will keep it safe forever.

9-11. Lord, we have thought about Your love for us, and have come to

Your Temple to worship You. Your fame extends to the ends of the earth. Everywhere people praise You. Your right hand is full of kindness. Let Mount Zion rejoice and the villages of Israel be glad because Your decisions are fair.

12-14. Come, all you pilgrims; look at Jerusalem on Mount Zion. Count her towers; notice her walls. See her fortifications; visit her palaces so that you may tell your children. The city belongs to our God. He will guide His people forever.

The Foolishness of Riches

49 Hear this, everyone! Listen, all you people on earth, small and great, rich and poor. I have a word of wisdom for you based on understanding. Let me write it out for you and then sing it as I play on my harp.

5-8. Why should I fear when troubles come or when evil men surround me? They trust in their wealth and brag about how rich they are. But not one of them can pay for the salvation of his brother. The price of redemption is too costly.

9-13. No one lives forever. Everyone dies, whether wise or foolish, and leaves their money to others. Their graves will be their home, even though cities carry their name. People die, just as animals do. This life is all there is for the foolish and those who follow their example.

14-15. Like sheep that are buried, their beauty will fade and their bodies will rot. But God will redeem me and save me from the power of the grave.

16-20. So don't be awed by the rich and famous. When they die, they will take nothing with them. Even those who are praised for their success will die and be buried, just as were those

before them. They will never see the light of day. People who boast of their wealth don't understand God's plan. They are like animals that die and are gone.

God Is Judge

50 The mighty God has spoken and called the earth to account from east to west. His presence will shine out from Jerusalem. Our God will come and will not keep silent. Fire burns in front of Him, and a storm surrounds Him. He will call on heaven and earth to witness His judgment and the defense of His people.

5-6. He will say, "Gather My faithful people to Me." Let the angels of heaven declare the righteousness of God. He is judge of all the earth, just and fair in all He does.

7-9. God says, "Listen to Me, My people. I am your God. I will testify against you because you have put your hope in your sacrifices and offerings. I do not need the bulls or goats from your fields.

10-13. "All animals are Mine, those in the woods and the cattle on a thousand hills. Every bird on the mountains and every living thing in the field belongs to Me. If I were hungry, I wouldn't tell you, because the world and everything in it is Mine. I don't need your sacrifices.

14-15. "It is more important for you to show gratitude and keep your promises. Call on Me when you are in trouble. I will come and help you, and you will honor Me."

16-18. To the wicked God says, "What right do you have to teach My law and talk about My covenant? You don't like to be told what to do, and you turn your backs on what I say. When you see a thief, you go with him. You spend time with men who are unfaithful to their wives.

19-21. "Your mouth is full of evil and your tongue makes up lies. You accuse your own brothers and sisters of things they have not done. You've been doing this for some time, and I have said nothing. So you thought that I was like you. But I will show you that you're wrong and will do it to your face."

22-23. "Think about this, those of you who forget Me. If I decide to destroy you, who can save you? I will help those honor who Me and do what's right. I will show them My salvation."

Forgiveness

51 Have mercy on me, Lord, according to Your kindness and tender mercy; forgive my sins. Wash away my guilt; make me clean again. I know what I have done and can't forget my sin; it is always with me. It's against You that I have sinned and done this great evil. You have a right to judge me and condemn me.

5-7. From the day I was born I wanted my own way. But You want me to be honest and good. So teach me wisdom and tell me what to do. Take away my sin, and I will be clean again. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

8-11. Let me hear songs of joy and gladness. Heal the bones You broke, so I can be happy again. Take away my sins. Create in me a clean heart, and put a right spirit inside of me. Don't turn away from me, Lord; don't take Your Holy Spirit from me.

12-13. Restore the joy of Your saving love and hold me up by Your Holy Spirit. Then I will teach sinners Your ways, and many will be converted to You.

14-15. Forgive me for shedding innocent blood. You are the God of my salvation, the only one who can save me. I will sing of Your goodness and shout Your praise.

16-17. If You needed sacrifices before You could forgive me, I would bring them. What You want are the sacrifices of a broken spirit and a heart that is sorry. These You will not turn from and reject.

18-19. Lord, do what is best for Jerusalem, according to Your good pleasure. Rebuild our walls. Accept the offerings of your people and the animal sacrifices we bring to Your altar.

The Reward of the Proud

52 Why does a warrior like you boast of his strength and of the evil he does? God's law hasn't changed. Yet you keep on making evil plans. Your tongue is as sharp as a razor, telling lies.

3-4. You love to do evil more than good, to lie more than to tell the truth. You love words that bite and lies that sting.

5-7. But God will destroy you. He will take you out of your tent and remove you from the land of the living. Those who do right will see this and stand in awe of God. They will say, "Look at what happened to those who did not honor God, who cared more for riches and were bold in doing evil."

8-9. But I am like a young plant growing in the house of God. I will trust in the Lord's mercy. I will thank Him forever for what He has done for me. I will praise Him in the presence of His people. I will hold on to His name because it is good.

The Fool

53 Only a fool says, "There is no God." He says it because he's corrupt and doesn't want to do what's right. But no one is wise enough to live a perfect life.

2-3. God looks down from heaven to see if any are wise, if any really want

to know Him. But it seems that everyone has turned away from God and become corrupt. There is not one who is really good, not one.

4-5. Don't the wicked know? They destroy people as easily as they eat bread, and think nothing of it. They never think about God. Suddenly they're scared. God will defeat them and scatter their bones, because He has rejected them.

6. Oh, that deliverance would come to Israel. When God delivers us from our captivity, we will rejoice and be glad.

A Prayer for Deliverance

54 Save me, O Lord, for Your name's sake. Judge me and vindicate me by Your power.

2-3. Please hear my prayer and listen to what I have to say. Strangers have turned against me, and cruel men want to kill me. They don't believe in You.

4-5. God is my helper; He will sustain me. He will repay my enemies and reward them for their evil. He will destroy them because of His faithfulness to what is true.

6-7. Lord, I will bring sacrifices to You. I will praise Your name, for You are good. You delivered me from all my troubles, and I have seen my enemies defeated.

A Prayer for Help

55 Hear my prayer, Lord. Don't turn away, but listen to me. My mind wanders because I'm worn out from worry and from what I see and hear.

3-5. The wicked accuse me of things I have not done. They want to cause trouble because they hate me. I hurt inside, and the fear of death has me in its grips. I'm terrified and shake all over when I think of what will happen if our enemies take over.

6-8. How I wish I had wings like a dove so I could fly away. I would quickly find a home in the wilderness away from the wind and the storm and away from my enemies.

9-11. Lord, confuse their plans. Everywhere I look I see violence. Our enemies wait outside the city walls, and inside, crime and evil are everywhere.

12-14. If an enemy insulted me, I could understand that. If someone who hated me turned on me, I could run and hide. But it was my colleague and friend, the one who worshiped with me, who betrayed me.

15-17. Let death take my enemies. Let them go down to the grave. Wickedness is in their houses. I will ask the Lord to help me. Morning, noon, and night I will pray to Him, because I know that He will hear me.

18-19. He will protect me in battle and save me from my enemies. The Lord will punish them because they refuse to change and have no fear of God.

20-21. My friend has turned against me. He has broken the agreement we made. His tongue is as slippery as butter, but war is in his heart. His words are as smooth as oil, but his hand is ready to draw his sword.

22-23. Give your burden to the Lord, and He will sustain you. He will never let those who try to do right be overcome. Lord, I know that someday You will destroy the wicked. Murderers and liars will be no more. I will put my trust in You.

A Prayer for Relief

56 Be merciful to me, Lord, and help me. Every day my enemies think of new ways to fight against me. When I am afraid, I will trust You. I will feed on Your word and praise You with all my heart. I will not be afraid, because I

trust You. What can my enemies really do to me?

5-7. Every day people twist my words. They have set their minds against me, waiting for a chance to kill me. Don't let that happen, Lord. Punish those who are against me.

8-9. You know all about me. You know the tears I've shed. You have written everything down. When I call on You for help, my enemies will turn back. I know this because You're not against me, but for me.

10-13. I will trust in You, Lord, for no one can hurt me when You're by my side. I will keep the vow I made to You. I will praise Your name. You delivered me from death and kept my feet from slipping. You have saved my life. As long as I live I will walk in Your light.

A Prayer for Safety

57 Be merciful to me, Lord, because I trust You. I will hide under Your wings until the storm is past.

2-3. I cry to the Lord for help, and He will send help from heaven. He will punish those who are against me. He will show His mercy and love.

4-6. Lord, I feel as if I'm surrounded by hungry lions; their teeth are as sharp as swords. Even though You are in heaven, let Your glory be seen on earth. My enemies had set a trap for me. I was scared. They dug a pit for me, but fell into it themselves.

7-8. Lord, my confidence in You is strong, and my faith is fixed. I will sing Your praises. I will awaken at dawn, take up my harp, and praise You.

9-11. I will praise Your name among the nations. I will thank You in public. Your compassion is as big as the sky. Your faithfulness is as great as the universe. May Your name be exalted, and may Your glory fill the earth.

A Prayer Against Wickedness

58 Do you rulers make just decisions? Do you judge the people fairly? No, you make unjust decisions and spread violence throughout the earth.

3-5. As soon as man is born, he's interested in himself. He lies from the time he's small. He's been bitten by that old serpent, the devil, and the poison of sin is in him from birth. He's as deaf as a snake that can't hear the music of a snake charmer, no matter how well he plays.

6-8. Lord, close the mouths of these human lions and break their teeth. Let their strength drain away like water. Let them be like broken arrows. They're like snails leaving a slimy trail behind them. May they be like a baby born dead, who never saw the sun.

9. One day the wicked will burn up and be blown away like dust in the wind. It will happen faster than you can heat a pot.

10-11. Good people will be glad when evil is gone. They will walk on the ground where the wicked have died. They will say, "God is just. He destroys the wicked and rewards the righteous. He does what is right."

A Prayer for Protection

59 Lord, save me from my enemies. Deliver me from these evil men. They want to kill me. Look! They're waiting to ambush me. Why? What have I done? They're out to get me. Lord, wake up and help me! Show them no mercy.

6-8. They come back at night and prowl the streets like dogs. Their lips are as sharp as swords. They think no one is listening. But, Lord, You know what they're saying; You laugh at their pride.

9-11. Lord, You are my strength, my hope, and my defense. I know You love me and will have mercy on me. Use Your power to defeat my enemies. Don't just destroy them, but do it in such a way that the people will know that it came from You and not me.

12-13. Lord, put an end to their cursing and lying. If You have to destroy them, then do it. That may be the only way for people to know that You are the King of Israel and that the whole world belongs to You.

14-15. My enemies are like a pack of dogs roaming the streets looking for food, and growling if they don't get what they want.

16-17. Lord, in spite of this, I will sing of Your power. In the morning, I will sing of Your kindness and care. You have been my fortress in times of trouble. You are my strength. I will sing praises to You. You are my defense, the one who is merciful to me.

A Prayer for Victory

60 Lord, You let us be attacked and scattered. If we have not pleased You, please forgive us and restore us to Your favor. You made the earth shake and the ground crack. Things are hard, and our people are suffering. They stagger as if they're drunk.

4-5. You have given us the banner of truth. Help us display it. Deliver us by Your power. Please hear my prayer.

6-8. Then God spoke from His sanctuary, saying, "I will triumph over My enemies. I will take the land and divide it, for it is Mine. Gilead is Mine, and so is Ephraim and Judah. I will punish Moab and Edom. I will throw My shoe at the Philistines."

9-12. Who will come and join me to fight against Edom? The last time, God did not go with us, but now He will. We can't do this on our own. But

with God on our side, we will defeat our enemies.

God's Protection

61 Hear my cry, Lord. Listen to my prayer. I'm a long way from home and feel discouraged. My heart is afraid. Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I, where I can hide. You have always been a shelter for me, a tower of safety.

4-5. I long to be in Your sanctuary and live with You forever. I long to be under Your wings. Lord, You know that I promised to serve You all the days of my life. You have given me a place among Your people, among those who stand in awe of You.

6-8. Prolong the life of the one You chose to be king. Give me many more years. Help me be a blessing to many generations. Let me abide in Your presence. Show the king Your mercy and truth to preserve him. Then I will sing praises to You and promise to serve You every day.

Trusting God

62 I will wait for God, because He is my salvation and the source of my strength. The Lord is my rock and my defense. He alone can save me. I will not be afraid.

3-4. How much longer will my enemies come after me? I am like a leaning wall, a tottering fence ready to fall down. They want to push me over. They lie about me. They bless me with their mouths, but in their hearts they curse me.

5-7. I will wait patiently for the Lord to save me. My hope comes from Him. He is my rock, my fortress, and my defense. I will not be afraid. He is my salvation, my strength, and my hiding place.

8-9. Listen, my people, put your trust

in the Lord. Pour out your hearts to Him. He is our refuge. Man is nothing but a puff of wind. Men are not always reliable. Weighed in a scale against God, they are lighter than air.

10-12. Don't depend on force. Don't put your hope in dishonesty. And don't rely on riches. Two things I know about God. One, all power belongs to Him. Two, He is full of mercy. He will reward each person according to what he has done.

Longing for God

63 Lord, You are my God. I long for You. My whole being thirsts for You like a man in a dry and empty land. I have felt Your presence in the sanctuary and have seen Your power. Your loving-kindness is better than life.

4-5. I will praise You and give thanks to You as long as I live. I will lift up Your name in prayer. I feel satisfied when I'm in Your presence. My heart is full of praise.

6-8. When I go to bed at night, I think of You. When I wake up during the night my thoughts turn to You. You have loved me and helped me all along life's path. I will hide under Your wings and rejoice. I long for You. I know that You will hold me up.

9-11. Those who want to destroy me will not succeed. They will die in battle. They will be like dead foxes in the field. The king will rejoice. All who put their trust in God will see His glory, and the mouths of liars will be stopped.

A Prayer for Protection

64 Hear me, Lord. Please protect me. Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked. Their tongues are as sharp as swords, and their words are like stinging ar-

rows. They viciously attack the innocent and don't care.

5-6. They meet secretly and lay plans to do evil. They tell themselves that no one knows what they're doing. They think that they have come up with a perfect plan. How their minds work is hard to understand.

7-10. But God knows, and He will destroy their plans. They are the ones who will be hurt. He will turn their words against them. All who see this will stand in awe of God and tell what He has done. The people will be glad and trust Him even more. All those who are honest will praise the Lord.

Answered Prayer

65 Lord, we will praise You and keep the promises we made to You. You have answered our prayers. Now others will also come to You for help. Our guilt has almost overwhelmed us, but when we confessed our sins You forgave us.

4-5. Happy are the people You chose to be Your own. You allow them to come into Your Temple, and You fill their hearts with good things from Your house. You have answered our prayers in amazing ways. You are our Savior. All over the world Your people trust You, no matter where they live.

6-8. You made the mountains. You can quiet storms and calm the waves. People stand in awe of Your power. You fill the mornings and evenings with beauty and joy.

9-11. You water our fields and enrich our soil. You fill the streams with water and the earth with crops. You bring rain to the hills and soften the earth. You make the plants sprout and grow. You crown our year with harvests. Our wagons are full.

12-13. Pastures are painted with living green, dotted with sheep. Our hills are

covered with joy, and our valleys are full of corn. All things shout and sing for joy.

nore my prayer, nor did He stop loving me.

Praise to God

66 Make a joyful noise, all you lands. Sing to the glory of God and honor His name. Offer Him sounds of praise. Sing: "How wonderful are Your works! Your power is so great that Your enemies tremble. One day all the earth will worship You, and people will praise your name."

5-7. Come, see what the Lord has done. Let me tell you some of His amazing deeds. He opened the Red Sea so that our ancestors could cross on dry ground. How they rejoiced when they saw what God had done for them! God rules forever and keeps His eyes on every nation. Let not the rebellious exalt themselves.

8-9. Come, my people, let's praise God together. Let everyone hear you sing. God has protected our country and has kept us from defeat.

10-12. Lord, You have tested our faith, as men test silver in fire. You let us be trapped. You put heavy burdens on our backs. You let our enemies come and walk all over us. We had to go through fire and flood. But You finally brought us into a good and safe place.

13-15. I will go to Your sanctuary with sacrifices and offerings to thank You for what You have done for us. I will do what I promised when I was in trouble. I will bring extra sacrifices and offerings to You, as I said I would.

16-19. Come, my people, all you who love and respect the Lord. I will tell you what the Lord has done for me. I cried to Him for help and praised Him with songs. If I had held on to sin in my heart, He would not have listened to me, nor would He have answered me. But He did hear me, and answered my prayer.

20. I praise the Lord; He did not ig-

God's Blessings

67 Be merciful to us, Lord, and bless us. Let Your face shine upon us so that the whole world will learn Your ways and know that You can save them. Let our people praise You. Let everyone praise Your name.

4-5. Let us be glad and rejoice, because our God will judge the people fairly. He guides the nations of the earth. Let everyone praise the Lord. May all the nations of the world praise the Lord.

6-7. The land has produced a large harvest. Once again God has blessed us. He will continue to bless us, and people everywhere will respect and honor Him.

God's Goodness

68 God speaks, and His enemies scatter. He takes action, and those who hate Him turn and run. They disappear like smoke blown by the wind. As wax melts before a fire, let the wicked perish in His presence.

3-4. But let the righteous be glad and rejoice. Sing to the Lord! Sing praises to His name. He rides on the clouds. He is the Lord. Rejoice in His presence.

5-6. He is a Father to the fatherless. He defends the widows and gives the lonely a home. He sets prisoners free. But for those who turn against God, there will be famine and distress.

7-10. Lord, when You brought Your people out of Egypt, the earth shook, the heavens thundered, and the mountains moved. You are our God, the God of Israel. You gave us needed rain. You gave us our inheritance, and Your goodness took care of the poor.

11-14. The Lord spoke, and the news went out. Then kings and armies fled. Women at home divided the spoil. Silver and gold were there for the taking. When God used His mighty arm to scatter kings, it was like a snowstorm on a mountain.

15-18. Look at the mountains, how majestic they are; how rugged are their peaks! God chose Mount Sinai to be His mountain. The chariots of the Lord are thousands of angels. God came down on Mount Sinai and received sacrifices and gifts. Then He went back home like a victorious king, with much plunder and many captives.

19-23. Bless the Lord, who daily shows us with benefits. He is our God and Savior. He saves us from death. He will defeat our enemies and punish those who live in sin. The Lord said, "I will bring you back from the mountains and from the depths of the sea. You will walk on the ground where your enemies shed their blood."

24-27. Lord, we watched as the priests carried the ark. It was like a victory parade. The choir went first, and the musicians followed. Praise the God of Israel. Look! There are the leaders of Benjamin, then the leaders of Judah and the other tribes. They are all praising God.

28-30. Show Your power and strength again, the same power that You used to help us before. Then our enemies will make peace. Rebuke Egypt and the nations around us. They're like angry bulls ready to charge. Then they will submit and bring You their gifts of silver and gold. Defeat and scatter those who delight in war.

31-33. Ambassadors will come from Egypt and elsewhere with gifts. They will lift up their hands in prayer to You. Sing praises to God, all you nations. Sing praises to Him who rides in the heavens. Listen to Him

who thunders with a mighty voice.

34-35. Proclaim the power of God and His majesty over Israel. His strength is seen in the heavens. Lord, Your presence in the sanctuary is awesome. The God of Israel gives strength and power to His people. Blessed be God forever.

A Plea for Help

69 Save me, Lord! I feel as if water is up to my neck, and I'm sinking fast. Waves of despair crash over my head, pushing me under. I'm exhausted from crying. My throat is dry from asking for help. My eyes can't see, because of my tears.

4-5. Those who hate me are more than the hairs on my head. They want me to give back what I never took from them. Lord, You know what I've done. I can't hide anything from You.

6-8. You are in charge of the armies of heaven. Don't let those who have placed their hope in You be ashamed because of me. O God, I need You. I'm willing to live with ridicule and shame if that is what's needed, even if my brothers and relatives treat me like a stranger.

9-13. Lord, I'm filled with zeal for Your good name. When I fast and pray, my brothers laugh at me. When I put on clothes for fasting, they joke about it. Drunkards make up songs about me. But I will continue to pray to You. I know that You love me, and will answer me and save me.

14-18. Lord, keep me from sinking. Deliver me from those who hate me. Don't let my enemies drown my faith in You. Don't let the grave swallow me up. Please hear my prayer. In Your goodness turn to me. I'm in real trouble. Please hurry to help me and save me from my enemies.

19-21. Lord, You know how people insult me. You know how they shame

and disgrace me. Their insults have broken my heart. I thought that someone would take pity on me, but no one took pity on me, no one came to comfort me. When I was thirsty, they gave me vinegar to drink.

22-25. May the celebrations and feasts of victory turn against my enemies. I wish that they were blind and crippled, so that they couldn't attack us anymore. Lord, let them feel Your anger. Let them taste the consequences of their wickedness. Destroy their camps, and may no one live in their tents again.

26-28. They attack those You love and have disciplined. They brag about the pain and suffering they have caused us. Lord, don't overlook what they have done. They don't deserve to have their names in the book of life with the righteous.

29-33. Lord, I'm really hurting. Please save me. I will praise You in song. I will tell of Your greatness and lift up Your name in thanksgiving. This is better than the sacrifice of sheep and goats. The poor see this and are glad. The Lord listens to those in need, and does not look down on prisoners.

34-36. Let heaven and earth praise the Lord. Praise Him, all you creatures on land and sea. He will save Jerusalem and build up the cities of Judah. His people will live there. Our children will inherit the land, and those who love Him will live there.

A Cry for Help

70 Lord, please hurry and save me! Let those who seek my life be defeated and put to shame. Let those who want to hurt me be turned back in confusion. Let those who laugh at me be forced back in disgrace. **4-5.** But may those who love You say, "Let God's name be praised and mag-

nified!" Lord, I need You. Please hurry! Come and help me! You're the only one who can deliver me. Please don't delay!

Trusting the Lord

71 Lord, I put my trust in You. Let me never be put to shame. Deliver me and help me escape. Please listen to me and save me. Be my refuge. Command Your angels to rescue me. You are my fortress. Deliver me from the hands of cruel and wicked men.

5-9. Lord, You have always been my hope. I have trusted You since I was young. You have protected me since I was born. I want to be an example to others. You are my protector. I will praise You forever. All day long I try to honor You. Please don't reject me when I'm old. Don't forget me when my strength is gone.

10-13. My enemies make plans to take my life. They say, "God has left him. This is our chance. Let's get him." O God, please help me! And hurry! May those who want to hurt me be confounded and covered with shame and disgrace.

14-16. Lord, I will always put my hope in You, praising You more and more. I will tell others of Your salvation, even though it's more than I can understand. I will tell of Your mighty acts. I will proclaim Your goodness and Yours alone.

17-18. Lord, You have taught me since I was young. I have told others about Your wonderful works. Now that I'm old and gray, please don't forsake me. Give me strength to tell the children about Your power and might.

19-21. Your righteousness is as high as the heavens. You have done great things. Who is like You? Though You have let me go through lots of troubles, You have always restored my strength

and lifted my spirits. Someday You will bring me up from the grave. You have extended my influence and comforted me with Your presence.

22-24. I will praise You on my harp and sing songs of praise to Your faithfulness. You are the Holy One of Israel. I will shout for joy as I play for You. I will sing with my whole being because You have saved me. All day long I will talk of Your goodness, because those who wanted to hurt me have been put to shame.

A Prayer for Solomon

72 Lord, give the new king wisdom, and my son Your righteousness. Bless him with a sense of justice. May the land be filled with peace. My prayer is that he will help the poor and save the children of the needy. May he punish those who harm them. May the people respect him as long as the sun shines and the moon is in the sky.

6-7. Your presence will be like a gentle rain on thirsty ground, as showers that water the earth. The country will prosper, and peace will be in the land, as surely as there is a moon in the sky.

8-11. May he rule like Your Son. May he reign from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea. May his influence extend to the ends of the earth. People from everywhere will come and bow before him. Even his enemies will admit that what he does is right. Kings will bring him gifts, and nations will bow and serve him.

12-14. He will deliver the needy when they cry for help. He will have pity on the poor and save those who are weak. He will put an end to deceit and violence.

15-17. Long live Solomon, our new king! May the gold of Sheba be laid at his feet. May the people pray for him every day. May our nation's crops be

plentiful. May our cities grow. May the king's name endure forever, as long as there is a sun. He will bless nations, and they will bless him.

18-19. Blessed be the Lord, the great king of Israel, the only one who can make all this happen. Bless His holy name. May the whole world be filled with His glory. Amen and amen.

20. This is the prayer that David, the father of Solomon, prayed for his son.

The Justice of God

73 God is good to the pure in heart. As for me, my feet almost slipped. I almost lost my hold on You, Lord. I was jealous of the success of the wicked. They seemed to have no problems and looked so strong.

5-9. They don't seem to have the difficulties that we have. They're full of pride, and show it by the way they walk and dress. They speak evil of everyone, and even scoff at heaven. They talk as if the world belongs to them.

10-12. People look up to them. They don't see anything wrong with what they do. The wicked say, "If God knew what we were doing, He would stop us. This shows that He doesn't really care." Yet these are the very people who prosper. Their riches increase, and still they want more.

13-16. Why should I try so hard not to sin, to be innocent? What's the point? I struggle with such thoughts as I see the wicked prosper. If I spoke this way, I would be untrue to You, Lord. Yet the more I think about all this, the more I feel the pain.

17-20. This lasted until one day I went into Your sanctuary and realized the future of the wicked. Then I saw things differently. I saw that they were actually on slippery ground. Unless

they change, they will be destroyed. They will be gone in a moment because of their sins. They will be nothing more than a very bad dream.

21-24. Why was I so jealous of the wicked? How foolish of me! I just wasn't thinking right. Lord, You are always by my side, and that's all that matters. You hold me by the hand and lead me along. When life is over, You will let me go to sleep. Later, You'll wake me up and take me home to be with You in glory.

25-26. No one in heaven or on earth understands me the way You do, Lord. I don't ever want to be without You. My mind and body may fail, but You are the strength of my heart forever.

27-28. Those who go through life without You will perish. They will suffer the results of what they have done. It's good for me to stay close to You. I trust You, Lord, and will tell everyone what You have done for me.

A Prayer for Deliverance

74 Lord, I feel as if You've abandoned Your children. Are You displeased with us? Remember Your people You brought out of Egypt and redeemed from slavery. Mount Zion in Jerusalem is Your mountain.

3-8. Just look at the ruins of our beloved city. Our enemies have placed their flags in the sanctuary. They have used their axes and hammers to destroy what they could. Then they set Your house on fire—the very place where we worship You. They said, “We will destroy these people for good.”

9-11. The symbols of Your presence are gone. No prophets are left. How long, Lord, will You let our enemies laugh at us? How long will they insult Your name? Why don't You do something?

12-15. You are our king and Savior. We have seen Your power. By Your strength You divided the Red Sea. You crushed the power of Egypt and gave us food in the desert. You opened the flooded waters of Jordan for us to cross into Canaan.

16-17. Day and night are Yours. You made the sun, moon, and stars. You make the seasons of summer and winter.

18-21. But, Lord, Your enemies laugh at You. How they hate Your name! Don't let them take us into captivity. Remember Your covenant with us. These people are violent and cruel. They're like wild beasts caught in a den. Don't let us return ashamed. Help us to praise Your name.

22-23. Rise up, O Lord, and defend Yourself. Every day these godless people who occupy our land laugh at You. Don't forget what they say about You or the threats they continually make against You.

God's Righteous Judgment

75 We thank You, Lord. Your wonderful works show the greatness of Your name.

2-5. You said, “I have set a time when I will judge the world. I will judge fairly and do what's right. I will tell the proud to stop boasting, and the wicked to stop being stubborn and raising their heads like horned animals.”

6-8. No one from east, west, north, or south can judge fairly. God alone is judge. He decides who is guilty and who is not. He holds life and death in His hand. The wicked will have to face what they have done.

9-10. But as for me, I will praise Him. I am not afraid of God's judgment, for He will destroy the wicked and exalt the righteous.

The Victory of God

76 God is honored in Israel. His house is in Jerusalem. He lives on Mount Zion. Here is where He stopped our enemies and crushed their weapons of war.

4-7. Lord, how great You are. You are more majestic than the mountains. Strong and powerful enemy soldiers are sleeping, lying dead on the field. At Your word both riders and horses were stopped. Who can stand up against You?

8-10. You spoke, and the earth was quiet and listened. You came to judge and deliver all who were suffering. Even man's anger against You brings glory to Your name.

11-12. So let us praise the Lord and give Him what we promised. Let all nations around us bring gifts to Him. He is most worthy of our honor. He has humbled the spirit of princes and is awesome in the sight of kings.

What God Has Done

77 I cried to the Lord for help, and He listened to me. When I was in trouble, I prayed all night. I complained to the Lord. My spirit was crushed, and I couldn't sleep. I hurt so much that I could hardly talk.

5-6. I try to think of the past when I felt You close to me, Lord. I thought of what You had done for our ancestors. I prayed, and carefully searched my own heart.

7-9. I said to myself, "Will the Lord turn away from us forever? Will He ever favor us again? Has He stopped loving us? Are His promises not any good anymore? Has He forgotten how to be merciful?"

10-12. Then I realized I was depressed. So instead I tried to think of the times when the Lord had been

near and when He had done great things for us. I thought about the works of His hands and talked about His mighty deeds.

13-18. Lord, no God is as great as You. You are a God of miracles and power. You redeemed Your people. The waters saw You and were afraid. The heavens thundered Your presence, and lightning filled the sky. The clouds poured out water. Your voice was heard in the whirlwind. You lit up the sky and shook the earth.

19-20. You opened the Red Sea, and we walked through on dry ground. Though we saw no footprints, we knew that You were there. You led us gently, using Moses and Aaron as our shepherds.

God's Kindness

78 People, listen to me. Pay attention to what I have to say. I'm going to tell you about the past, what our ancestors told us. We will not hide anything, but will tell you about the Lord's glorious power and the wonderful things He has done. **5-8.** He wrote out His commandments for us and told our ancestors to pass them on to their children. In turn they will pass them on to their children. So each generation can put their hope in the God of Israel and keep His commandments. Then they will not be like some of their ancestors who rebelled against the Lord and were not loyal to Him.

9-12. The tribe of Ephraim was well armed, but during the battle they turned and ran. They were not living up to the covenant they had made with the Lord. They forgot what He had done for them. He worked miracles to bring them out of Egypt and set them free.

13-16. The Lord divided the Red Sea and led them across on dry ground. During the day His cloud protected them from

the sun, and at night a pillar of fire kept them warm. He opened rocks and gave them water. He also made springs bubble up from desert sands.

17-20. But the people turned against Him. They put God to the test by demanding that He give them the same kind of food they had had in Egypt. They even challenged Him, saying, "He can't do that, not here in the desert. He gave us water, but He can't give us meat and bread."

21-25. When the Lord heard that, He was very displeased. The fire of His presence destroyed many of them. They neither believed Him nor trusted His ability to save. So He opened the sky and gave them manna for bread. They ate angels' food, and had all they could eat.

26-29. He caused the wind to blow, and flocks of quail flew in from the sea and fell into the middle of their camp. So the people had more than enough meat to eat.

30-33. They craved meat so much that they forgot that the Lord had sent it. So while the meat was still in their mouths, the fire of the Lord's presence destroyed the rebel leaders. But the people kept right on sinning and refused to trust the Lord. So He let them camp in the wilderness for a very long time.

34-37. But some turned back to Him and repented. They remembered that He was their rock, their Redeemer, the one who had protected them. Some obeyed Him outwardly but were not loyal to Him in their hearts.

38-39. Yet He was full of compassion and did not destroy them. He forgave them many times. He remembered that they were just human and that their lives were like a breeze that blows and then is gone.

40-42. It's hard to count how many

times they rebelled against the Lord. Again and again they brought pain to the God of Israel. They forgot what He had done for them and how He had delivered them.

43-51. They forgot the miracles that He did in Egypt to set them free. They forgot about the plagues that He sent, how the water turned to blood, about the flies, the frogs, the locusts, and the hail and lightning. They forgot how He went through the land and all the firstborn died.

52-55. He led His people out like a shepherd and guided them like a flock. They were no longer afraid, because He closed the Red Sea and drowned their enemies. He brought His people to His holy mountain. God drove out nations and divided the land among the tribes, settling them in their homes.

56-58. After all this, His people still didn't listen to Him. They did the same things that their ancestors had done. They were disloyal and ungrateful. They greatly displeased the Lord with their idols and carved images.

59-64. When God saw this, He was hurt. He withdrew His presence from the sanctuary, and let the ark be captured. Their enemies burned their cities, and many people died, including young men and women, elders and priests. The shock was so great that even the widows could not cry.

65-66. Then it was as if the Lord woke up from a sleep. He was like a mighty warrior rushing into battle. He beat back their enemies and put them to shame.

67-69. He rejected the tribe of Ephraim as the lead tribe and chose the tribe of Judah. He set up His presence on Mount Zion, which He loved. He built His Temple on her heights and planned for it to last forever.

70-72. He also chose David, the

shepherd boy, and asked him to watch over His people. So David became king and served the Lord with all his heart.

A Prayer for Mercy

79 Lord, the heathen have invaded our country again. They have defiled Your holy Temple. They have turned Jerusalem into ruins. The dead bodies of Your people lie in the streets. Blood is everywhere. Other nations scorn us.

5-7. How long will You let this go on? How long will this fire burn against us? When will You punish the nations who don't recognize Your authority, those who have destroyed our homeland?

8-9. Lord, please forget what we have done against You. Be merciful and save us. We need Your help. You are our only hope and salvation. For the sake of Your name, deliver us and take away our sins.

10-12. Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Let them know who You are by punishing them. May their people taste what it's like to be defeated and suffer. Let these nations realize what they have done, how they have shamed Your name.

13. We are Your people, Lord, the sheep of Your pasture. We will thank You forever for saving us. We will sing Your praises for all generations.

A Prayer for Restoration

80 Lord, You are the shepherd of Israel. You have watched over us the way that a shepherd watches his flock. The light of Your presence is between the angels in the Most Holy Place. Come and save us.

3-7. Restore us, O Lord. Make Your face shine on us and save us. How long will You wait before answering our

prayers? Grief sweeps over us, and our lives are full of tears. Neighboring nations scorn us, and our enemies laugh at us. Please restore us to Your favor, and make Your face shine on us again. Then we will be delivered.

8-11. You brought us out of Egypt and cared for us like a precious vine. You brought us into the land of Canaan. We covered the hillsides like a huge vine and became as strong as the branches of a giant oak. Our country stretched from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea.

12-13. But now our cities are broken down, and we're subject to every army that marches by. Wild animals come into our villages looking for food.

14-19. Please come and help us, Lord. Look down from heaven and see our suffering. We are like a vine to be cut down and burned. Rebuke our enemies. Come and defend us. We will be faithful to You and call on Your name forever. Restore us to Your favor, Lord, and make Your face shine on us again.

A Song

81 Sing to the Lord. Sing praises to our God. Shout for joy. Play on your harps, blow the trumpets, celebrate the Passover. This is what the Lord has asked us to do.

5-9. The Passover reminds us of when the Lord delivered us from Egypt, and the plague of death passed us by. He took the burden off our backs. He freed us from slavery. He spoke to us from the thunders of Sinai. He tested our faith. He asked us to listen to Him and not to worship idols.

10-12. He said, "I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt. I will feed you and take care of your needs. But you wouldn't listen. You didn't want

anything to do with My commandments, and so I let you have your own way.

13-16. "If you had listened to Me and walked in My ways, I would have subdued your enemies and rescued you. They would have acknowledged My power and never attacked you again. I would have fed you with the finest wheat and the best tasting honey."

God Rules Over All Things

82 God presides over the heavenly council and renders judgment. He says to earthly judges, "Don't be partial. Don't let the unjust go free. Defend the rights of the poor, the orphans, and the needy. Deliver the helpless from the hands of the wicked."

5-8. But these judges are living in the dark. They don't seem to understand. Because of such people, the whole world is in trouble. Though they are God's children, they still have to die, even as princes do. Arise, O God, and judge the earth, for it is Yours.

A Prayer for Help

83 Don't be quiet, Lord. Don't hold Your peace. Our enemies are ready to attack. They hate You. They've consulted together and made their plans. They say, "Let's destroy these people so that the name of Israel will be gone forever."

5-8. The Philistines and many other nations are forming an alliance, Lord. And the great nation of Assyria has promised to help them.

9-12. O Lord, defeat them as You did our enemies in the past. You did this many times. Please defeat this new alliance also. They say, "Let's go and take possession of the land of God."

13-18. Lord, make their armies as harmless as a tumbleweed blown by

the wind. Scatter their forces with fire, and drive them out of the mountains with wind and storm. Shame and disgrace them with defeat so that people will know that You are the God of the whole world.

Happy Are Those Who Love God

84 How beautiful is Your sanctuary, Lord! How I long to be in Your presence! With all my heart I want to be close to You.

3-4. The birds have made their nests near Your altar, where they raise their young. How happy are those who are near You in Your house of worship.

5-7. Blessed are those who find their strength in You and have their hearts set to come and see You. When they pass through the valley of the way here, blessings will fall on them like gentle rain. They will go on from strength to strength until they come before You at Mount Zion.

8-10. O Lord, hear our prayers. You are our shield. Look with favor on the king. One day with You is better than a thousand days elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to live in luxury among the wicked.

11-12. The Lord is our sun and shield. He showers us with kindness and grace. He will not withhold anything good from those who love and obey Him. O Lord, how happy are those who put their trust in You!

A Prayer for God's Favor

85 Lord, thank You for turning our country around and prospering us again. You have forgiven our sins and covered our iniquities. You have stopped punishing us and are helping us again.

4-7. Lord, You are our salvation. We know that You are not an angry God.

Revive us again. Show us Your mercy and grant us Your salvation.

8-9. I will listen to what the Lord says, because He has promised peace to His people. He is ready to help those who honor Him, so that His glory may be seen in the land.

10-11. Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth springs up from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven.

12-13. The Lord will give us what is good, and our land will prosper. Righteousness is what He is looking for. It prepares the way for Him to bless His people.

A Prayer for Mercy

86 Please listen to me, Lord, for I am needy and helpless. Keep my heart, because I have given it to You. You are my God, and I am Your servant who trusts You. Be merciful to me, for I pray to You every day. Fill my heart with joy. I know that You are kind and good, always ready to forgive and full of mercy toward those who call on You.

6-10. Listen to me, Lord. Please hear my prayer. When I'm in trouble, I will call on You, because I know that You will answer me. There is no God like You. No deeds can compare with Yours. One day all nations will bow before You. They will glorify Your holy name, for You alone are God.

11-13. Teach me Your way, O Lord, and I will walk in Your truth. Give me a heart that wants to obey You. I will praise You and honor Your name forever. Your love and mercy are great. You have saved me from the grave many times.

14. Lord, a gang of ruthless and violent men are after me. They have no

respect for You, and don't listen to what You say.

15-16. But You, Lord, are compassionate, gracious, and kind; full of mercy and truth. Please turn Your heart toward me. Give me the strength that I need. Lord, if for no other reason than for the sake of my mother, who loved You, please save me.

17. Lord, give me a sign of Your love so that my enemies can see how good You really are and be ashamed of themselves. You are the one who has watched over me, comforted and protected me.

The Glories of Jerusalem

87 The Lord built His city on a holy hill. He loves Jerusalem. Glorious things have been said about the city of our God.

4. The Lord says, "When I make up a list of the people who know Me, it will include people from Egypt, Babylon, Tyre, Ethiopia, and many other countries. All these people are Mine even though they were born somewhere else."

5. Of Israel He says, "These people were born there." The Most High loves Jerusalem and secures the city.

6. When the Lord makes up the list of His people, those who are truly His, He will take into consideration where someone was born and where they grew up.

7. As for the singers and players, they will praise His name.

A Prayer When Depressed

88 Lord, I have cried before You day and night. Please hear my prayer. So many troubles have come my way. I feel as if I'm about to die. My strength is gone. I'm on the edge of the grave. It feels like a dark pit.

7-9. Your displeasure is heavy on me,

Lord. Waves of sorrow sweep over me. My friends have left me. I feel locked in and can't get out. My eyes are weak from so much crying. Every day I pray to You.

10-12. Lord, do You work miracles for the dead? Do the dead praise You? Do they talk to each other about Your faithfulness? Can the dead see the wonderful things You do? Do they appreciate Your righteous deeds in their place of forgetfulness?

13-16. Lord, every morning I cry out to You for help. Why don't You answer me? Are You turning away from me? I have suffered a lot since I was young. I have often been near death's door. Will You abandon me? Will Your displeasure cut me off?

17-18. Troubles surround me, closing in on me like a flood. My closest friends have forsaken me. Darkness and depression are all that's left.

A Song About God's Love

89 Lord, I will sing of Your mercy and love. I will proclaim Your faithfulness to all generations. I know that Your love and mercy are forever and that Your faithfulness is always there.

3-4. The Lord said, "I have made a covenant with David, My servant. I promised that one of his descendants would rule forever and that the royal line of David would never die out."

5-8. Lord, the heavens praise You. The angels sing about Your faithfulness and the wonderful things You have done. Who can compare to You? Who is equal to You? You are greatly respected and revered by those in heaven. No one is as mighty as You, as faithful and as trustworthy.

9-10. You rule over the stormy sea and calm the powerful waves. One word from You can crush a huge

whale. With Your strong arm You defeat and scatter Your enemies.

11-14. The universe belongs to You. You created the earth, everything from north to south. The mountains sing Your glory and rejoice in Your name. How mighty You are! How powerful and strong is Your right arm! Your kingdom is built on justice. Love and mercy shows in everything You do.

15-18. Happy are the people who worship You, who walk in the light of Your presence. You are their glory and strength. Because of You they are honored and exalted. The Lord is our shield. The Holy One of Israel is our king.

19-22. Years ago You told the prophet Samuel to anoint David king under You. You spoke to him in vision and promised to help him. You said You'd give him the strength he would need to defeat his enemies. They would be subject to him, and the wicked would not overcome him.

23-26. You promised to strike down his enemies, to be faithful to him and exalt his name. You promised to extend his kingdom from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean. He will call You Father, the rock of his salvation.

27-29. You promised to exalt him and make him a great king. You said that You would love him and that Your promise to him would never fail. His royal line would never die out. His throne would be secure and last as long as heaven.

30-32. You said that if the people don't walk in Your ways, but break Your commandments, You would have to discipline them. You would have to punish them for their sins.

33-37. You promised not to leave David. You would be faithful to him. You would keep Your word and not break Your promise or lie to him. You

said that David's royal line would last forever, as long as the sun shines and a moon lights up the night sky.

38-39. Lord, are You displeased with Your anointed king? Have You forsaken him? Have You forgotten Your promise and given his crown to someone else?

40-42. Lord, You have let our enemies come and destroy our fortifications. Their troops have been victorious. Those who came with them took what they wanted and laughed.

43-45. Our swords were useless. You have not stood by the king in battle. You have taken away his glory. You have made him old before his time and covered him with shame.

46-48. How long will You do this, Lord? Will You hide Yourself from David forever? Are You angry with me? Lord, our lives are so short. We don't live forever. Who can keep himself from dying, from going down to the grave?

49-51. Lord, where is Your loving-kindness, and where are the promises that You made? My enemies laugh at me. They make fun of me every time that I take a step or make a move.

52. Lord, in spite of this, I will love You and praise You for who You are. Yes, the Lord be praised forever. Amen.

God's Eternity

90 Lord, You have been our security for all generations. Before this earth was created and the mountains were formed, You were there, and You always will be.

3-4. You say to us, "Return to dust," and we do. To you a thousand years are nothing. They are as a day is to us or as a watchman's rounds in the night.

5-7. You can sweep all of us away, as You did the people at the time of the flood, and put us all to sleep. Com-

pared to You, we're like flowers that bloom in the morning, then wither and die in the afternoon. You could consume us in a moment. The very thought of Your great power overwhelms us.

8-12. You know everything we do, even what we do in secret. Our lives are like a short story. All we have is seventy years, eighty if we're strong. Much of our lives is spent working. Then we're gone. But You live forever. Your power is limitless and Your displeasure fearful. Help us to realize how short our lives are and know how to fill our hearts with wisdom.

13-17. How long before You bless us again, Lord? Be kind to us. Fill us with Your love in the morning so that we can sing Your praises and be glad. For years we've had nothing but trouble. Let Your glorious deeds be seen among us and our children. Watch over the work that we have done for You and make it last.

The Lord Is Our Fortified City

91 He who spends time in the secret place of prayer will find rest in the shade of the Almighty God. I say to the Lord, "You are my strength and fortified city. I will place my trust in You."

3-6. The Lord will deliver you from Satan's traps and from the deadly poison of sin. He will cover you with His wings. His truth will be your shield and defense. You will no longer fear what comes by day or by night.

7-8. Thousands will die all around you, but death will not touch you. With your own eyes you will see what will happen to the wicked.

9-13. Because you have made the Lord your refuge, no evil will hurt you, and no plagues will come near your home. God will send angels to

protect you as you walk in His ways. They will lift you up so that you won't slip and hurt yourself on a stone. Lions and snakes will not hurt you.

14-16. Because the Lord loves you, He will deliver you. He says, "I will exalt those who know Me. They will call on Me, and I will answer them. I will be with them in their troubles to the very end. I will deliver them and honor them. I will give them eternal life and show them My salvation."

A Sabbath Song

92 It's good to give thanks to the Lord and sing praises to our God. In the morning tell of His loving-kindness and at night speak about His faithfulness. Praise the Lord on instruments of music and with melodious sounds. Sing praises to His name.

4-6. Lord, You have made my heart glad by what You have done. My heart overflows with praise. What great things You do! How deep are Your thoughts! The spiritually blind can't see the hand of God in things, nor do fools understand His ways.

7-9. The wicked are like weeds, springing up everywhere. But the time is coming when they will be brought low and destroyed. But You, Lord, are exalted forever. Those who are against You will perish. The wicked will be gone and will be no more.

10-11. Lord, You are the one who has lifted us up and restored our self-respect. You have given us the oil of peace and happiness. I have seen our enemies defeated and our attackers turn and run.

12-13. The righteous will be like stately palm trees. They will grow as strong as the cedars of Lebanon. They will be like trees planted in heaven, in the courtyard of the Lord.

14-15. Even in their old age they will bear fruit for the Lord. They will proclaim the goodness of the Lord. He is their rock. There is no evil in Him.

The Lord Is King

93 The Lord is king. He is dressed in majesty and power. He created the earth and put it in its place, and no one can move it. Your throne, O Lord, has been from the beginning of time, from all eternity.

3-4. The oceans raise their voices to You in praise. Their waves send forth sounds of Your majesty and power. But more powerful than the oceans is the power of our God.

5. Your testimonies are sure. Holiness and goodness fill Your Temple forever.

God Is Our Refuge

94 Lord, discipline comes from You. You punish when it's needed. You are the judge of the earth. You will reward the proud for what they have done.

3-7. How long will the wicked boast of their violence? They are hurting the innocent and doing everything they can against Your people. They take advantage of widows and orphans, and murder those they don't like. They keep saying to themselves, "The Lord doesn't care what's going on down here."

8-11. How can people be so foolish? Will they ever learn? God made ears; can He not hear? He made eyes; can He not see? The Lord is still in charge, and He still disciplines. He knows how foolish our thoughts are.

12-15. Happy are those to whom the Lord has taught His law. They have an assurance that the wicked do not have. The Lord will not abandon those who belong to Him. He will not

forsake them. The time will come when justice will have its day and the righteous will be glad.

16-19. Who will stand up for me against the wicked? Who will help me against the evildoers? If the Lord had not stood by me, I would be dead. I said to myself, "My feet are slipping. This is the end." But each time the Lord held me up. When worries filled my life, His presence made me happy.

20-23. Can iniquity have fellowship with You, Lord? Wicked judges are using the law against the innocent and condemning those who do right. But the Lord is my judge and my defense. He will protect me and carry out justice against the wicked. They will reap the consequences of their own iniquity. The Lord will cut them off.

A Call to Worship

95 Come, let us praise the Lord. Let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving, and praise His holy name.

3-5. The Lord is a great God and a great king above all others. He holds the deepest valleys in His hand. The highest mountains belong to Him. The oceans are His, and so is the dry land. He formed them all with His own hands.

6-7. Come, let us bow down and worship Him. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. He is our God and we are His people, the sheep of His pasture. Let's listen to Him.

8-11. The Lord says, "Don't harden your hearts and be stubborn, as your ancestors were. Don't doubt My love, as they did after all I did for them. For forty years I had to keep them out of Canaan because they refused to listen to Me. So I took an oath that I would

not give them the resting place I had in mind for them."

God's Judgment Is Good

96 Let us sing a new song to the Lord. Let the whole world sing praises to Him. Sing to the Lord and bless His name. Tell everyone the good news of salvation. Declare His glory. Tell the people about His mighty acts.

4-6. God is great and greatly to be praised. He is above all gods. These gods are only idols. But He is the one who made the heavens and the earth. Glory and majesty surround Him. Beauty fills His sanctuary.

7-10. Praise the Lord, all you people. Tell of His glory and strength. Give honor to His name. Bring an offering when you come into the Temple. Worship Him, for He is holy. Bow down in awe and respect. Tell all the nations that the Lord is king. He made the earth and put it in its place, and it cannot be moved. He judges the nations fairly.

11-13. Let the heavens be glad and let the earth rejoice. Let the oceans roar with laughter. Let the trees wave their branches and shout for joy. The Lord is coming to judge the world with righteousness and His people with truth.

The Lord Is Great

97 The Lord is king! Let the earth rejoice. Let the islands of the sea be glad. His throne is built on what is right and fair.

3-6. When He appears, fire will destroy His enemies. Lightning will fill the sky and light up the whole world. The earth will tremble from the sound of thunder. The mountains will melt like wax. The heavens tell about His goodness, and the people see His glory.

7-9. The wicked will be put to shame. They have worshiped idols when

they should have worshiped the Lord. But those who love God are glad and rejoice in the judgment of the Lord. Lord, You are the ruler of the earth. You are far greater than all the idols put together.

10-12. Those who love the Lord will hate evil. He watches over His people and delivers them. His light shines on the righteous, and joy comes to those who are honest in heart. So rejoice in the Lord, and be thankful for what He has done for you.

A Song of Praise

98 Sing a new song to the Lord. He has done wonderful things. His strong arm has given us the victory. The Lord has shown us His salvation. He saved us from our enemies. The nations have seen it. He remembered His promise and mercy. God has been faithful, and people everywhere have seen what He has done for us.

4-6. Sing to the Lord. Praise Him with instruments of music and shouts of joy. Sing along with the harp. Bring out the trumpets. Shout for joy before the Lord, our king.

7-9. Let the oceans roar with praise. Let every living thing praise the Lord. Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the hills echo with songs of praise. Let the earth sing for joy, because the Lord is coming to judge the earth in fairness.

Praise the Lord

99 The Lord is king. Let the nations tremble. He sits between two great angels. Let the earth bow in reverence. The Lord is great. Let everyone praise His name, for He is holy. The king loves the Lord, for He is just and fair. He does what is right. Exalt the Lord and worship Him, for He is holy.

6-7. Moses and Aaron were His servants, and so was Samuel. They called on the Lord, and He answered them. He spoke to them from a pillar of cloud. They kept His rules and the law He gave them.

8. Lord, You answered their cry for help. You loved them and forgave them. But You also disciplined them for their sins.

9. Praise the Lord our God and worship Him, for the Lord our God is holy.

God's Faithfulness

100 Sing joyfully to the Lord, all you who live on earth. Serve the Lord with gladness. Come into His presence with singing.

3-4. Know that the Lord is God. He is the one who made us, and not we ourselves. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture. Come into His presence with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. Be grateful for what He has done for us, and praise His name forever.

5. The Lord is good. His love never fails. His truth and faithfulness continue for all generations.

God's Love and Justice

101 I will sing about You, Lord, about Your love and justice. I will behave myself and be careful how I live, even at home, because I love You.

3-5. I will not look at anything wicked. I hate what evil men do, because it turns me away from You, Lord. This world will not influence me. I will not listen to anyone who slanders his neighbor. I will not be friends with those who are proud.

6-7. I will help those who are faithful to the Lord by inviting them to my house. I will neither welcome into my

home those who are dishonest, nor invite liars to stay overnight.

8. Every morning I will commit myself to You, Lord, and promise to oppose anything evil. I will put those who are wicked out of the city.

God's Love Is Forever

102 Hear my prayer, Lord. Listen to my cry for help. Don't hide from me when I need You. Please answer me quickly. **3-7.** My life is slowly fading away. It will soon disappear like smoke. I am burning with fever. I feel like cut grass drying in the sun. I don't feel like eating. I'm nothing but skin and bones. I feel like a lone vulture in the wilderness, like an owl in the desert or a sparrow alone on a housetop.

8-11. People make fun of me and insult me. My food tastes like ashes. Tears fall into my drink. Lord, are You upset with me? I feel as if I've been picked up and thrown to one side. Each day is like a shadow that comes and passes away. My life is drying up. **12-17.** But You, Lord, live forever, and Your name is known to all generations. I know that You will have mercy on Jerusalem. Now is the time. We love every stone in her wall and even the dust on her streets. One day the Lord will appear in glory and rebuild Jerusalem. He will answer the prayers of His people and will not turn away.

18-20. We will record everything that the Lord has done for us so that our children can read about it and praise the Lord. They will say, "The Lord looked down from heaven. He heard the cries of His people and came and rescued them."

21-22. The name of the Lord will be praised in Jerusalem. Someday people from every nation will come and serve the Lord.

23-28. Lord, it looks as if my strength is gone, and my days are numbered. Please don't let me die in the middle of my life. You created the earth and the sky. One day they will wear out, and You will give them a change of clothes. But You're always the same. You never change. Our children will live in Your presence forever.

Praise the Lord for His Kindness

103 Praise the Lord! May everything within me praise His holy name. Praise the Lord, and don't forget all His benefits. He forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases. He has redeemed your life. He loves you and is merciful to you. He renews your strength like the eagle's.

6-7. The Lord will see that justice is done. He let Moses see His mighty acts when He set His people free.

8-10. The Lord is merciful and gracious. He is very kind and never gets angry. He will not always discipline. He neither punishes us as we deserve, nor repays us for our sins.

11-14. His love is as high as the heavens. He has removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. The Lord is a kind Father. He loves and cares for His children. He knows what we are made of, and that our bodies will return to dust.

15-16. Man's life is like dry grass, like flowers that bloom and then are gone when the wind blows.

17-18. But God's mercy continues forever. Those who love and respect Him will be given eternal life. This is also true for their children. He doesn't forget those who love and obey Him.

19-22. The Lord's throne is in heaven. He is king of the universe. Praise the Lord, all you angels who are pleased to carry out His commands. Let

everything praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul!

Praise God's Power in Nature

104 Praise the Lord! How great He is! Lord, You are full of glory and majesty. You are covered with light. You stretch out the sky like a covering over our heads. The clouds are Your chariots. You ride on the wings of the wind. The angels are Your messengers, and fire is Your servant.

5-6. You put the earth in its place, and no one can move it. You covered the earth with water, including the highest mountains.

7-9. When You spoke, the waters heard Your voice, rushed away from the mountains into the valleys, and came together where You told them to. You told them to stay in place and not to flood the earth again.

10-15. You made the springs and rivers. You provided water for the animals. You made the birds to nest in trees and sing their songs. You water the earth with rain and make the grass to grow. You water our fields to give us food. You make our vineyards and olive trees grow, and give us grain for bread to make us strong.

16-19. You water the huge cedar trees of Lebanon. Birds build their nest there. You taught the wild goats how to climb steep mountains. You put the moon in place to make the months, and the sun to mark the days and seasons.

20-24. You made the day and the night. At night the young lions come out looking for food, and before morning they go back to their dens to rest. In the morning people go to work until evening. Lord, in Your wisdom You arranged everything and filled the earth with Your riches.

25-28. The oceans are full of creatures, large and small. Ships go there, and that's where the whales play. All these things depend on You. You provide their food, and they go and get it. You open Your hand and fill them with good things.

29-30. When You turn away from them, they're afraid. When You take their breath away, they die. Through the Holy Spirit You sustain everything. Every day the earth is renewed.

31-32. The glory of the Lord will last forever. He rejoices in what He has made. He can look at the earth, and it trembles. He can touch the mountains, and they smoke.

33-35. I will sing and praise the Lord as long as I live. I will do so with my whole being. My thoughts of Him are sweet, and the joy I have comes from Him. Someday sinners will be gone, and wickedness will be no more. Praise the Lord, O my soul! Praise the Lord!

God's Care for His People

105 Give thanks to the Lord. Tell the people what He has done. Sing praises to the Lord. Tell of His wonderful acts. Bring glory to His name. Rejoice in the Lord.

4-10. Look to the Lord every day for strength. Remember the great things that He has done for the children of Abraham. He is the Lord our God. His commandments are for the whole world. His covenant is true and will last forever. He gave His promise to Abraham, then to Isaac and Jacob.

11-15. The Lord said, "I will give you the land of Canaan for your inheritance." He said that when His people were few in number, when Abraham and his family were moving from one place to another. God watched over them and told kings not to harm

them. He told them that Abraham was His chosen servant and prophet.

16-22. Then a famine came, and God sent Joseph ahead of his family to Egypt. He was sold as a slave and later put in prison. His faith in the Lord's promise was tested. But finally the king released Joseph and made him governor over all Egypt. He had more authority than the king's advisers.

23-27. Then Jacob and Joseph's brothers and their families moved to Egypt, where they increased. The Egyptians got scared and turned against them, making them their slaves. Then the Lord told Moses and Aaron to free them. He performed mighty miracles for them.

28-36. God sent darkness over the land, but the Egyptians rebelled against Him. He turned their rivers into blood. He let frogs, flies, and lice cover the land. Lightning and hail damaged the trees. Locusts and caterpillars ate their crops. Finally He took the life of every firstborn son and animal.

37-40. Then He brought His people out of Egypt with silver and gold. The Egyptians gave it to them, glad to see them go. He led them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He fed them with bread from heaven. When they were thirsty, He gave them water from a rock. He did not forget His promise to Abraham.

43-45. He set His people free, and they sang for joy. He gave them their own land. He did all this for them so that they could obey Him and keep His laws. Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord for Forgiveness

106 Praise the Lord! Give thanks to our God, because He is good. His mercy never ends. Who can know all

the wonderful things that the Lord has done? Who can praise Him enough for His mighty acts?

3-5. Happy are those who do right, who keep His commandments. Lord, when You bless Your people, don't forget about me. Include me when You save them. Let me share in their happiness and experience their joy.

6-9. Lord, we have sinned, as our ancestors did. They didn't appreciate what You did for them in Egypt. They forgot how merciful You were. At the Red Sea they doubted Your power. Yet You saved them. You told the waters to part. They did, and Your people walked across on dry ground.

10-12. You saved them from the king's army coming after them. The Red Sea closed up, and the king and his troops drowned. Not one of them was left. Then our ancestors believed Your promises and praised You for what You had done.

13-15. But before long they forgot again. They wanted the kind of food they had eaten in Egypt. They questioned Your love and care. So You gave them what they wanted, and they ate so much that they got sick. Many of them died.

16-18. Some were jealous of Moses and Aaron. You caused the earth to open up, and the leaders of the rebellion fell in. Then fire from Your presence destroyed the others.

19-23. At Sinai our ancestors made a golden calf. In place of You, they worshiped a statue of an animal that eats grass. They forgot the great miracles the Lord had done to bring them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. Moses pleaded with You to forgive them, and You did.

24-27. Yet they still didn't believe that You could bring them into the Promised Land. They complained and wouldn't listen. So You had to let them stay in the

wilderness until that whole generation died. Many of them were killed in battle, and some were taken captive.

28-29. Later they joined the people of the land in worshiping Baal and ate meat sacrificed to the spirits of the dead. Then You disciplined Your people and sent a terrible plague among them.

30-31. Phineas saw a man bring a pagan priestess into the camp to be his wife. He decided that both should die because of their rebellious sin. Then the plague stopped. He received credit for doing what was right.

32-33. Later the people sinned again. They put such pressure on Moses that he became angry. He acted foolishly and took credit for the miracle of water himself.

34-36. After they got to the land You had promised them, they refused to drive out the wicked Canaanites who lived there, as You had told them to. Soon they were marrying them and were worshiping idols, as they did.

37-39. They even sacrificed their newborn babies to evil spirits and idols. Violence and bloodshed were everywhere. But still they were unfaithful to the Lord, and did whatever they wanted to do.

40-42. You were displeased with what You saw. You had to remove Your protection from them, and they were defeated and ruled by those who hated them. Their enemies oppressed them and made them pay.

43-46. Time and time again You rescued them to show them that You cared. But they went still deeper into sin. Whenever they cried for help, You rescued them. You never forgot the covenant that You had made, and You continued to be merciful. You even caused their captors to be kind to them.

47-48. Help us, Lord, and bring home our people who are still in other countries. We will thank You and praise You forever. Praise the Lord God of Israel forever. Let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the Lord!

The Lord Is Good

107 Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His mercy lasts forever. Let His people tell what He has done, how He saved them from their enemies and brought them home.

4-7. Our ancestors lived in tents with no city to call their own. At times they were hungry and thirsty and almost gave up hope. Then they prayed, and You saved them from their troubles. You led them to a city they could call their own, and named it Jerusalem.

8-9. Let us praise the Lord for His goodness, and for the wonderful things He has done. He feeds us, and fills our hearts with His goodness.

10-11. Some were in dark prisons at the point of death. Others were taken captive by our enemies. This happened because they had rebelled against You, Lord, and didn't follow Your counsel.

12-16. You broke their pride by hard labor. They cried for help, and You saved them. You lifted their spirits and brought them out of bondage. We should thank the Lord for His goodness and for the wonderful things He has done. He broke through the gates of our enemies, and cut the iron bars that held us.

17-20. Our people were foolish and suffered because of their wicked ways. They were dying until they called to You for help, and You saved them. You spoke, and they were healed. You delivered them from death.

21-22. We should thank You, Lord, for

Your love and all the wonderful things that You have done. Let us thank the Lord with sacrificial giving and songs of joy.

23-27. Some of our people make a living sailing ships. They too see what the Lord can do. He speaks, and the winds come. The waves swell, and the ship begins to rock. It's lifted high into the air; it crashes back down. The men's hearts melt with fear. They stagger on deck as if they were drunk. They're at their wits' end.

28-30. Then they cry to the Lord for help, and He saves them. He calms the storm and stills the waves. The men are glad that the waters are quiet again, and that the Lord has brought them safely home.

31-32. We should thank the Lord for His love and the wonderful things He had done. We should exalt Him in our congregations and praise Him in our meetings.

33-34. The Lord caused rivers to dry up and mountains springs to quit flowing. He turned farmland into wasteland because of people's wickedness.

35-38. He turned deserts into farmland by causing springs to flow. He brought in hungry people and helped them build a city. They plowed and planted and harvested. He blessed their families and increased their livestock.

39-42. They were humbled by sorrow and oppression. The Lord let the proud wander in the wilderness. But He rescued the humble and delivered the needy. He blessed their families until they became a tribe. The righteous saw all this and praised the Lord. The wicked had nothing to say.

43. Let those who say they are wise think about these things. Then they will understand the love and kindness of God.

Confidence in God

108 Lord, my heart is fixed on You. I will wake up early and praise You on my harp. I will sing praises to Your name in front of all the people.

4-6. Your love and mercy is higher than the skies. Your faithfulness reaches up to the clouds and spreads throughout the universe. Save us by Your power, O Lord. Deliver the people You love.

7-11. Lord, You have said, "I will divide the land of Canaan among My people. It belongs to Me. So does Manasseh, Ephraim, and Judah. But I'm against the land of Moab and Edom, and I will triumph over the Philistines."

10-13. Lord, who will lead us against Edom and their great walled cities? Won't You go with us and give us the help we need? Without You, our efforts are worthless. But if You go with us, we know we can defeat our enemies.

False Accusers

109 I praise You, Lord. Please don't be quiet, but speak up. Wicked people are spreading lies about me. They're against me, even though I loved them and prayed for them. They return evil for good, and hatred for friendship and love.

6-8. May their leader be taken to court. Let Satan himself be there to accuse him. May he be found guilty, and when he asks for mercy, may his prayer be evil in Your sight. May he die young, and may a good man take over his leadership.

9-15. May his wife and children feel what it's like to be hungry, lose their home, and have to beg. May the creditors take what they have, and may no one have pity on them. May he have no grandchildren. May his wickedness and

the wickedness of his father and mother not be forgotten. May the Lord put an end to this wicked family forever.

16-20. This man never showed kindness. He took advantage of the poor. He forced them out of their houses, even those who were handicapped and sick. He cursed anyone he didn't like, and never blessed anyone. He wore wickedness like clothes and refused to change. May the Lord reward him for what he and his friends have done against me.

21-25. Lord, help me, as You promised You would. Out of Your mercy, deliver me. I need You and feel hurt. I'm only a shadow of my former self. I'm so weak from fasting that I can hardly stand up. When people see me, they shake their heads and laugh.

26-28. Help me, Lord. I have no one to lean on but You. Let my enemies know that You're on my side. They may curse me, but You can bless me. Shame those who hate me, so that I can be happy again.

29-31. Let my accusers be shamed and disgraced so that they will let me alone. Then I will praise You and let all the people know what You have done for me. The Lord defends the helpless and stands by the needy. He saved me from the hands of the wicked.

God's Son Is King

110 God said to my Lord, "Come and sit next to Me. I will put all Your enemies under Your feet." He sends out my Master with power and strength and says, "Go conquer Your enemies."

3. In the day of battle Your people will fight for You. The youth will come as the early-morning dew and stand by Your side.

4. When God takes an oath and gives His word, He will not change His

mind. He said to my Lord, "You will be the new High Priest of My people."

5-7. So my Lord will sit on God's right side. He will conquer all His enemies. He will judge nations and crush their wicked rulers. Then He will drink from the stream of living water to refresh Himself, and hold up His head in victory.

God's Faithfulness

111 Praise the Lord! I will thank the Lord with my whole heart when His people meet. How great is the Lord! All who love Him delight in His works. Everything He does is honorable. His goodness never ends.

4-6. He wants His works to be remembered. He is gracious and full of compassion. He is ever mindful of His promise. He shows His power by giving His people the inheritance He said that He would.

7-9. In all He does He is faithful and true. His promises and commandments are sure. His word is trustworthy and stands forever. He has redeemed His people and made a covenant with them. Holy and reverend is His name.

10. Respect for the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. He will give a good understanding to all who obey Him. Our praise for Him will never end.

Doing What's Right

112 Praise the Lord! Happy is the man who respects the Lord and loves to obey Him. His children will be an influence for good throughout the land. His descendants will be blessed. His house will be full of good things, and his rightdoing will last forever.

4-5. Light shines on the pathway of an honest man. He is kind and compassionate. He does what is right.

He is generous and conducts his affairs wisely.

6-9. A good man will not be shaken when bad things happen, because his heart is fixed on God. He trusts Him. He is not afraid, for He knows that one day his enemies will be no more. He gives to the poor, and God will remember and honor him.

10. The wicked will see this and be troubled. They will grind their teeth in anger, but the desire they have to hurt God's people will perish with them.

The Compassion of God

113 Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, all you who serve Him. Praise His name. Blessed be the name of the Lord both now and forever. From the rising of the sun to its setting, may the name of the Lord be praised. The Lord is king over all nations, and His glory fills the heavens.

5-9. Who is like the Lord our God, who lives in space? He humbles Himself and takes a personal interest in everything in heaven and on earth. He helps the poor and needy, lifting them up so that they sit with princes. He honors the woman who has no children, and soon she becomes a joyful mother. Praise the Lord for all He does!

God's Power to Deliver

114 After Israel came out of Egypt, and Jacob's family left that foreign land, God placed His sanctuary in the tribe of Judah and took charge of His kingdom.

3-4. When the Red Sea saw God's people coming, it looked and ran away. Later the Jordan also parted and let them through. The mountains rejoiced, and the hills jumped like little lambs.

5-6. What made the Red Sea run away, and the Jordan flow backwards? What made the mountains rejoice, and the hills jump like little lambs?

7-8. The King was coming! The earth shook at the presence of God. He brought water out of rocks and made fountains bubble from granite cliffs.

God and Idols

115 Lord, to You goes all the glory for Your love and mercy and for the truth You have given us.

2-3. Why do people keep asking where our God is? Our God is in heaven and does whatever He pleases.

4-8. The gods of the heathen are idols of silver and gold made by people. They have ears, mouths, and feet, but they can't hear, talk, or walk. The people who made them are just like that. They have ears, but they don't hear what God is telling them. That's what happens to those who put their trust in idols.

9-11. People of Israel, trust in the Lord. He is our help and protection. He is our shield and defense. Everyone who worships the Lord should trust Him. He will help us.

12-13. The Lord remembers us. He will bless us. He will bless Israel and the descendants of Aaron. He will bless all who honor Him, whether they are rich or poor.

14-16. May the Lord bless you and your children more and more. May you be blessed by the God of heaven, who created the heavens and the earth. Heaven is His home, but He gave the earth to people.

17-18. The dead can't worship God. But we who are alive can do so. We will thank our God and praise His name forever. Praise the Lord!

Gratitude

116 I love the Lord because He hears me and answers my prayers. I will depend on Him as long as I live.

3-6. When death was all around me, I was sure that I was next. I cried out, "Lord, save me!" He heard me and came to my rescue. He is gracious and merciful. The Lord helps those who have a simple faith. When I was in trouble and trusted the Lord, He came and saved me.

7-9. Rest in the Lord, for He is good. He saved me from death. He stopped my tears and kept me from defeat. I will walk with the Lord as long as I live.

10-15. I trusted the Lord, even though I was in great pain. I couldn't trust people to help me, because they lie. What can I give to the Lord for His goodness to me? I will thank Him for saving me. I will keep my promise to Him. How precious to God are those who die trusting Him!

16-19. Lord, I'm the son of a mother who served You. You freed me from the bondage of sin. I will bring an offering to You with a heart full of thanksgiving. I will honor the pledge I made in front of all the people. I will praise the name of the Lord in the sanctuary. From the midst of Jerusalem I will praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord

117 Praise the Lord, all you nations. Let everyone praise the Lord.

2. His mercy and kindness are great. His truth endures forever. Praise the Lord!

God's Love Never Ends

118 Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love never ends. Let the peo-

ple say, "His love never ends." Let the ministers say, "His love never ends." Let everyone who worships Him say, "His love never ends."

5-9. When I was in trouble, I asked the Lord to help me, and He did. The Lord is with me, so I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me to take me away from the Lord? I will defeat those who hate me. It's better to depend on the Lord than on man. It's better to put your trust in the Lord than in princes.

10-13. My enemies surrounded me, but with the help of the Lord I destroyed them. They swarmed around me like bees, but they were destroyed as quickly as burning thorns. They viciously attacked me, but the Lord helped me overcome them.

14-16. The Lord is my strength and song. He is my salvation. Listen to the shouts of joy and gladness in the tents of the people. The right arm of the Lord gave us the victory. He came to our rescue. His right arm did mighty things.

17-18. I am not dead, as my enemies hoped I would be. I'm very much alive. Open the gates! I will come in and praise the Lord for what He has done. The Lord disciplined me, but He didn't let me die.

19-21. Open the doors of the Temple. We want to go in and give thanks to the Lord. Those doors are like the doors of heaven, through which the righteous will go. I will praise You, Lord, because You have heard me and saved me.

22-23. Remember how the stone that the Temple builders first rejected was the very one they had needed? This was the Lord's doing and is still marvelous in our eyes.

24-26. This is the day the Lord has made. Let's be glad and rejoice in it.

He will save us from defeat. Lord, prosper our country. Blessed is the One who comes in the name of our God. He will come to His Temple, and we will praise His holy name.

27-29. The Lord has made His light to shine on us. Bring your sacrifices to the altar. Lord, You are my God. I will exalt You. Let us all give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love never ends.

God's Law

119 Happy is the man whose ways are blameless, who lives by the law of the Lord. Happy is the man who seeks Him with his whole heart. Happy is the man who does no wrong and walks in the way of the Lord.

4-6. Lord, You have given us Your law and told us to keep it. I wish I would always be faithful and do Your will. Then I wouldn't be so ashamed of myself when I look at Your commandments.

7-8. I will praise You with my whole heart. I will apply Your law to my life and keep Your commandments. Please don't abandon me.

Obedience

9-11. How can a young man stay pure? By living according to Your word. Lord, I love You with all my heart. Don't let me disobey You. I have put Your words in my heart so I won't sin against You.

12-16. Praise to You, Lord. Please teach me Your ways and help me to obey. I recite Your commandments and rejoice in Your law more than in riches. I read and meditate on Your word every day. It makes me happy. I will not forget what You have said.

A Safe Guide

17-20. Lord, bless me with health and

strength so that I can keep Your commandments. Open my eyes so that I can see new things in Your word. I'm a stranger in this world and need You to guide me. With all my heart I long to know Your word better.

21-22. You rebuke the proud and discipline those who stray from Your commandments. Help me to live above the scorn and insults that I receive because I keep Your law.

23-24. Even if princes and rulers plot against me, I will still live by Your word. Your testimonies bring me great joy.

Eager to Obey

25-27. Lord, I've been humbled; please help me, as You promised You would. I confess my failings. Teach me Your laws so that I can understand them better. Then I will meditate on all the wonderful things You have said and done.

28-32. I'm tired, and long for Your presence. Make me strong, as You have promised. Help me not to lie. I have chosen the way of truth, and have set my heart to obey You. I will hold on to Your Word. Don't let me be put to shame. I will keep Your commandments because you put Your love in my heart.

A Prayer for Understanding

33-35. Lord, teach me the meaning of Your word so that I can keep it better. I will obey You with all my heart. Help me to keep Your commandments, because that's what makes me happy.

36-38. Turn my heart toward Your law more than toward getting rich. Turn my heart away from things and help me to walk in Your ways. Keep the promise that You made to those who are devoted to You.

39-40. Take away people's insults,

which hurt me so. I long to obey You. Renew my strength with Your goodness.

Trusting God's Word

41-42. Show me Your love and mercy and the salvation You promised. Help me to answer those who make fun of me because I trust Your word.

43-46. Don't take the word of truth away from me. Help me to let others know that trusting Your word brings hope. I want to keep Your commandments all the time. I am free because I keep Your law. I will share Your word with kings and not be ashamed.

47-48. I love Your commandments and all Your instructions. I lift them up and meditate on what they teach.

Rejoicing in God's Word

49-52. Lord, don't forget the promise You made. It has given me hope. It gave me strength and comfort when I was sick. The proud have made fun of my childlike faith, but I will not turn away from Your word. I will continue to find comfort in what You said so long ago.

53-56. I get angry when I see wickedness spreading throughout the land. But the beauty of Your word will continue to be my song. When I wake up at night, I think about You. It's because of who You are that I love and obey You.

Devoted to God's Word

57-58. Lord, You are my life. I promised I would keep Your word. More than anything in the world, I want to be like You. Be merciful to me, as You have promised.

59-61. When I think about what to do, I turn to Your Word for guidance. I love You, and want to obey You and keep Your commandments. Even though evil tries to pull me away from You, I have not forgotten Your law.

62-64. When I wake up in the night, I thank You for Your commandments. I am friends with all those who love You and obey You. This world is full of the evidence of Your love. Teach me more about Your word.

Appreciation of God's Word

65-66. Lord, please continue to help me according to Your promise. I believe in Your commandments. Please teach me what I should know, and give me good judgment

67-68. When I went astray, You disciplined me. So now I know better how to obey. You are so good and kind. Teach me more of Your word.

69-70. The proud try to ruin my reputation by telling lies about me, but I will keep Your commandments no matter what. Their hearts are wicked. But I love Your law.

71-72. It has been good for me to suffer, because I've learned to appreciate Your law even more. Your commandments are of more value to me than 10,000 pieces of silver and gold.

The Justice of God's Law

73-74. Lord, You are the one who created me. Give me a deeper understanding of Your law. Those who love You are glad to see me, because I too love You and trust Your word.

75-77. I know that Your law is right. It was good for You to discipline me. May Your love comfort me, just as You promised. Be merciful to me, that I might be strong and live for You. Your law is my delight.

78-80. May the people who have lied about me be ashamed. I will stay close to Your word. May those who love You and know Your testimonies be my friends forever. Help me to love Your law with all my heart and never be ashamed of You.

A Prayer for Help

81-84. Lord, I long for Your salvation. My hope is in Your word. But, Lord, my eyes are getting tired looking for what You promised. When will You come and comfort me? I feel as useless as an old piece of leather that smoke has dried up. I will not forget Your promise, but how much longer do I have to wait? When will You judge those who persecute me?

85-88. Those who are proud have set a trap for me. Those who say that Your law can't be kept are persecuting me. Help me, Lord. These people have almost done me in, but I will not turn against Your commandments. Renew my strength, Lord, according to Your kindness, so that I can keep Your law as I should.

Hope in God's Word

89-91. Forever, Lord, Your word is settled in heaven. Your faithfulness never ends. You created the earth, and it continues because of Your love and care. Seasons come and go according to Your word, and nature itself is your servant.

92-96. Your word has been my strength and joy; if not, I would have given up. I will not forget Your word; it has given me life. I'm all Yours, Lord. Save me. The wicked wait for a chance to kill me. But I find refuge in Your word. In this life perfection has its limits. But Your commandments are forever.

Love for God's Law

97-100. Lord, I love Your law. I think about it all through the day. Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies. I have more understanding than my teachers because I study Your testimonies. I have more wisdom than my ancestors because I obey Your law.

101-104. I have not gone where I shouldn't, because I want to keep Your commandments. I will not turn against Your law, because You have given it for our good. Your words are sweeter than honey. It's from Your law that I get to know right from wrong.

Appreciation for God's Word

105-106. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. With your help I promise to keep Your commandments.

107-108. Lord, I'm really suffering inside. Lift my spirits according to Your promise. Accept my offerings. Teach me more about Your law.

109-112. Lord, every day I take my life in my hands in defense of the country, but I will not forget Your word. My enemies are trying to trap me, but I will not turn away from Your word. Your testimonies are the joy of my heart. My mind is made up, and my heart is set on keeping Your law.

Courage From God's Word

113-114. Lord, I don't feel comfortable with double-minded people, but I love to keep Your commandments. You are my hiding place and shield. My hope is in You and Your word.

115-117. I wish those who are bad would leave me alone. I will keep God's commandments no matter what. Give me strength to live, Lord, and don't let me lose my hope in You. Hold me close to You, and I'll be safe. I will always keep Your law.

118-120. Lord, I know that You are not pleased with those who turn from Your commandments. Their dishonesty will get them nowhere. One day the wicked will be gone. I love You, Lord. I stand in awe of You and the rightness of Your judgments.

Help Me to Obey

121-122. Lord, I have tried to carry out justice. Protect me from those who hate me. Lord, watch over Your servant. Don't let the proud oppress me.

123-125. My eyes grow tired as I search for the promises in Your word. Deal gently with me, Lord, according to Your mercy. Teach me more of Your law. I am Your servant; help me to understand Your teachings better.

126-128. Lord, it's time for You to take action. People are breaking Your law. Your commandments are more valuable than gold. I know Your commandments are right and good; that's why I guide my life by them. I hate every evil way.

Wanting to Obey

129-131. Lord, Your testimonies are wonderful. That's why I hold on to them. Your Word brings light to the blind and gives understanding to the simple. My mouth hungers for Your word.

132-133. Be kind and merciful to me, Lord, as You are to all those who love You. Direct my footsteps and don't let sin control me.

134-136. Deliver me from those evil men who oppress me, so that I won't be hindered in keeping Your law. Make Your face shine on me and teach me Your word. Tears come to my eyes when I see how people are breaking Your commandments.

God's Word Brings Joy

137-138. Lord, You are righteous, and Your judgments are fair. Your testimonies are righteous and trustworthy.

139-141. My zeal for Your honor is wearing me out because of those who have forgotten Your law. Your promises are pure, and I love them. No matter how many people look down on me, I will not forget Your commandments.

142-144. Lord, Your righteousness will last forever. Your law is true. When my heart is troubled and I'm filled with fear, Your word makes me happy. Your testimonies are forever right. Give me understanding so that I can live by them.

A Prayer to Obey

145-149. Lord, I cry out to You with my whole heart. Please hear me. I want to keep Your commandments as I should. Save me from my enemies. Before the sun rises I'm up, praying for help. I put my hope in Your promises. At night I study and meditate on Your word. Lord, please hear me according to Your loving-kindness and preserve my life. I trust Your judgment.

150-152. Those who are eager to do wrong are coming to see me. They don't love Your law. But Your presence is here with me, and Your commandments are true. Long ago I learned that You never change and that Your law will last forever.

A Prayer for Help

153-156. Lord, I'm suffering. Please help me. I haven't forgotten Your law. Deliver me from my enemies as You promised. The wicked cannot be saved, because they don't want to obey You. You are so kind, Lord. Please be merciful to me, for I trust Your judgment.

157-158. I'm being persecuted because of my commitment to You. But I have no intention of changing. When I see what those who turn away from You are doing, I'm sad. They pay no attention to Your commandments.

159-160. Lord, I love Your law. Hold on to me according to Your loving-kindness. Your words are true, and Your commandments will last forever.

Peace to Those Who Obey

161-162. Princes persecute me without cause, but I will keep holding on to Your word. I'm happy when I study Your word and what You have said. It's like discovering great treasure.

163-164. I hate lying and dishonesty, but I love Your commandments. Seven times a day I praise You for Your right judgments.

165-168. Great peace have those who love Your law, and no offense will turn them away from You. I place all my hope in Your promises and will keep Your commandments. I obey You, Lord, because I love You. I have lived by Your commandments and held on to Your testimonies. You know everything I do.

A Prayer for Understanding

169-170. Lord, hear my prayer and give me understanding, as You promised. Listen to my earnest pleading and deliver me, as You said You would.

171-172. I praise You, Lord, for giving Your law. I will speak about Your word, because all Your commandments are right and good.

173-175. Help me, Lord, because I have chosen to keep Your commandments. I long to be with You, but for now Your law is my guide. Let me live a bit longer so that I can praise You. May Your word hold me up.

176. Lord, I feel like a lost sheep trying to find its way home. Help me, Lord; I have not forgotten Your commandments.

A Prayer for Relief

120 When I was in trouble, I called on the Lord, and He heard me.

2-4. Lord, help me not to lie or be influenced by those who are dishonest. What will happen to those who lie and do evil? For them God's judg-

ments will be as sharp as arrows and as painful as hot coals.

5-7. Living in the midst of liars is as bad as living among barbarians. Lord, sometimes I feel as if I have lived too long among people who lie and love to fight. I'm for peace, but they're for war.

Help Comes From the Lord

121 I will look up to the mountains. Where does my help come from? It comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let me slip or fall. He never sleeps. He's always awake and watches over His people day and night.

5-8. The Lord is your keeper. He is your shade by day and your protection at night. He will keep you from evil. He will take care of you. He will watch over your goings and comings, now and forever.

The Joy of Worship

122 I was so happy when they said, "Come, let's go to the Temple of the Lord and worship Him." So we went and stood inside the gates of Jerusalem. The city is beautiful and so well planned.

4-5. This is where the tribal leaders come to thank the Lord for what He has done for their people. This is where the kings of Israel sit to govern.

6-9. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May those who love her prosper. May peace be within her walls and prosperity within her gates. I pray for my brothers and sisters. May the peace of God be in their hearts. For the sake of God and His Temple, I will always seek the good of Jerusalem.

A Prayer for Relief

123 I will look to You, Lord, to the heavens where You live. As servants look to their masters, so we look to You. We depend on Your kindness and will look to You until You have mercy on us.

3-4. Be merciful and kind to us, Lord. We have endured so much ridicule for so long. The proud have scorned us, and the rich have shown contempt for us.

The Lord Is on Our Side

124 If the Lord had not been on our side, what would have happened to Israel?

If the Lord had not been on our side, our enemies would have killed all of us. Their armies would have come into our land like a flood and overwhelmed us. We would have been swept away.

6-8. Praise be to God, who kept us from being torn apart. We escaped from our enemies' trap like a bird. Their trap broke, and we got away. Our help came from the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth.

The Lord Is Our Strength

125 Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion. They can't be shaken. Just as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people.

3. The Lord will not let the wicked continue to rule our land, or the godly might be influenced to do evil.

4-5. Lord, be good to those who do good, to those who are honest in heart. But those whose ways are crooked will be banished with the wicked. May peace be on Israel.

A Happy Return Home

126 When the Lord brought us out of captivity and back to Jerusalem, it

was like a dream come true. We laughed and sang, we were so happy to be home. The nations said, "God has done great things for them." Yes, the Lord has done great things for us. That's why we're so happy.

4-6. Bring back the rest of the captives and restore our fortunes, Lord. Be to us like streams of water in the desert. Then those who cried when they planted their crops will reap their harvest with joy. Then those who took the seed to the field with tears will return with a harvest.

The Lord Builds the House

127 Unless the Lord builds the house, the work of the builders won't last. If the Lord doesn't shield our city from invading armies, there's no reason to have watchmen on duty.

2. It's useless to get up early or stay up late, worrying. The Lord helps those who trust Him sleep well.

3-5. Children are a gift from the Lord. They're like a reward from Him. Happy is the man who has many of them. His children are like arrows in the hands of a warrior. They will defend him so that he won't be ashamed to stand up to his accusers at the city gate.

Happiness and Blessings

128 Happy is the man who respects the Lord and shows it by walking in His ways. The Lord will bless him in his work, and he will be happy. His wife will be like a beautiful vine with fruit, and his children like little olive trees around his table.

4-6. A man who respects the Lord will be blessed. May the Lord bless His beloved city. May prosperity be in the gates of Jerusalem. May every man

see his children's children, and may peace be on Israel.

Song of Victory

129 Let Israel say, "I've been oppressed since I was young. My enemies persecuted me, using a whip until my back was covered with blood. But the Lord rescued me and freed me from the hands of the wicked."

5-8. May those who hate Israel be driven back in shame. Let them be like grass that dries up before it can grow, like a harvest that leaves the hands of the reaper empty. May no one say to them, "Blessings on you. We bless you in the name of the Lord."

Waiting for the Lord

130 From the depth of my heart I cry out to You, Lord. Please listen, and let Your ears hear my prayers.

3-4. If You held us accountable for our past sins, Lord, who could come into Your presence? But if we confess our sins, You are always ready to forgive us. That's why we love and respect You so much.

5-6. I can't wait for the Lord to help me. I put my hope in His word. I long for Him the way a night watchman longs for the morning.

7-8. Let Israel put her hope in the Lord. He is kind and merciful. He is well able to save us. The Lord will redeem Israel and forgive all our sins.

Trust in the Lord

131 Lord, I'm no longer proud. I've been humbled. I will not look down on others or try to do great things to show how smart I am.

2. I will be as content as a baby in its

mother's arms, and as secure as a child in her presence.

3. People of Israel, put your hope in the Lord, both now and forever.

The Lord Loves Jerusalem

132 Lord, remember how many hardships Your son David endured? Remember when he said, "I will not go to my house to sleep or rest until I make plans to build a house for my God, the mighty God of Israel?"

6-7. We heard that the ark was in Bethlehem. But when we went to look for it, we found it in another place. We said, "Let's bring it to Jerusalem. Let's worship the Lord there."

8-9. Lord, come to where Your ark is. May Your priests be righteous. May Your people sing for joy.

10-12. Lord, don't turn away from Your son David. You chose him to be king. The Lord will not break His promise. He said to David, "I will make one of your sons king after you. If he keeps My commandments, then his sons will rule after him. They will sit on the throne of Israel forever."

13-16. Without a doubt the Lord has chosen Jerusalem as His city. He said, "This is where My ark will be, and I will rule from here. I will bless Jerusalem, feed the poor, and care for the needy. I will make her priests agents of salvation, and the people will shout for joy.

17-18. "Also I will make the Strong One from David's family king forever. He will be a light to all nations. I will shame His enemies. His crown will be glorious, and His kingdom will last forever."

Unity of God's People

133 How good and pleasant it is for God's people to live together in unity. It's like the perfume that was sprinkled on Aaron's head and robes.

3. It's like the morning dew that gently falls on the mountains around Jerusalem, making everything moist and fresh. It's from here that the Lord will bless His people forever.

Praise the Lord

134 Praise the Lord, those of you who minister at night in the Temple. Raise your hands in prayer, and praise the Lord for another morning.

3. The Lord who made heaven and earth will hear you. From Jerusalem He will bless His people forever.

Praise God for Freedom

135 Praise the Lord! Praise His name! All you who serve Him in His Temple, come and praise Him. Praise the Lord, for He is good. Sing praises to His name, for He is gracious. The Lord has chosen Israel to be His special people, His very own treasure.

5-7. The Lord is great. He is above all gods. He does whatever He pleases in heaven and on earth and with the seas. He makes the clouds and brings lightning and rain. Even the wind obeys Him.

8-12. In Egypt He destroyed the first-born of people and animals. He worked miracles against the king. Later he defeated nations, the great and powerful kings who tried to keep Israel out of Canaan. He gave the land to His people forever.

13-14. Your name, Lord, endures forever. What You have done for us will never be forgotten. The Lord will

stand up for His people and will have compassion on those who serve Him.

15-18. The gods of the heathen are made of silver and gold. They have mouths, but can't talk. They have eyes, but can't see. They have ears, but can't hear. They have no lungs with which to breathe. Those who make these idols are just like that. They're blind and deaf to everything that's right and good.

19-21. Praise the Lord, all you people. Praise the Lord, those who minister in the Temple. Let us all come and worship the Lord. Praise the Lord in Jerusalem, where He makes His home. Praise the Lord!

God's Mercy

136 Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His love continues forever. Give thanks to the God of gods. His love continues forever. Give thanks to the Lord of lords. His love continues forever.

4-9. He alone can do great wonders. His love continues forever. He created the heavens and the earth. His love continues forever. He created the sun, moon, and stars. His love continues forever. He made the sun to shine by day and the moon by night. His love continues forever.

10-16. He freed His people from Egypt. His love continues forever. He divided the Red Sea and led His people through on dry land. His love continues forever. He defeated the king and his army. His love continues forever. He led His people through the wilderness. His love continues forever.

17-22. He defeated the kings of Canaan. His love continues forever. He defeated great and famous kings. His love continues forever. He gave the land to His people. His love continues forever.

23-24. He remembered His people when they needed Him. His love continues forever. He saved His people from their enemies. His love continues forever.

25-26. He feeds every living thing. His love continues forever. Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love continues forever.

Longing to Be Free

137 When we were captives in Babylon, we sat down by the river and cried when we thought about Jerusalem. We hung our harps on the willow trees and wept.

3-4. But our masters made us take them down and commanded, "Come, sing us some of your victory songs." Then they laughed. But how could we sing those songs while captives in a foreign land?

5-6. If I ever forget Jerusalem and God's people, let my right hand lose its strength. If I forget who I am or don't make Jerusalem my greatest joy, then let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth.

7-9. Lord, remember what the Edomites did the day the Babylonians took Jerusalem? They shouted, "Destroy the city! Level it to the ground!" Babylon will be destroyed. Her enemies will rejoice and will do to her what she did to us. They will kill her infants as she killed ours.

God's Goodness

138 I praise You, Lord, with all my heart. I will sing praises and exalt You. Every day I look toward Your Temple and praise You for Your loving-kindness and truth. You have exalted Your word and Your name. When I called on You for help, You answered me. You re-

newed my strength and courage.

4-5. All the kings and rulers who visit my palace praise You when they hear how You kept Your word and fulfilled Your promises. They leave singing Your praises. The glory of the Lord is great.

6-8. Even though the Lord is high above, He helps the poor and lowly, but not the proud. When I'm in trouble, He delivers me. He takes His stand against my enemies. The Lord will carry out His plans for me. His love endures forever. He does not abandon those who are His.

God Know Everything

139 Lord, You know me inside and out. You know when I sit down and when I get up. You even know what I'm thinking.

3-6. You're beside me all day long. When I go to bed at night, You're there. You know everything I say and do. You're in front of me, behind me, and all around me. You have put Your hand on me and drawn me close to You. I can't understand all this. It's too wonderful for me.

7-12. Where can I go from Your presence? If I went up into space, You'd be there. If I went to where the dead are, You'd be there. If I flew to a far distant island, even there You would hold me, and Your strength would support me. If I tried to hide in the dark, You would see me as clearly as if it were day. Darkness and light are the same to You.

13-16. Lord, You shaped me in my mother's womb. You made all my parts and put them together. What You did is amazing! Thank You for this wonderful body that You made. Everything You do is wonderful. I know that You saw me before I was formed. Even before I was born You knew how long I would live.

17-18. How precious are Your thoughts toward me, O God! There are so many that I can't count them. Every morning when I wake up, You're still there.

19-22. Lord, if only You would destroy the wicked. I wish those blood-thirsty men would get out of my life. They talk against You every chance they get, and even curse Your name. Lord, is it wrong to hate those who hate You? Your enemies are my enemies too.

23-24. Lord, search my heart. Test me, and know my thoughts. Point out anything offensive in me, and then lead me along the path to everlasting life.

A Prayer for Protection

140 Lord, deliver me from the plots of evil men. Protect me from those who are violent. They want to stir up trouble and then use it as an excuse for war. Their tongues are like poisonous snakes. Protect me from my enemies, Lord, from those who want to overthrow my kingdom. The proud have set their traps. They have spread their nets to catch me.

6-8. But I have cried to the Lord for help. I said, "You are my God. Please hear me. Only Your strength can save me. You've done this for me in battle before. Lord, don't let the wicked win. They'll become even more proud."

9-11. Let their heads be covered with the evil that they have caused. Let burning coals fall on their heads. Let them be caught in a fire or fall into a pit that they can't get out of. Don't let those liars succeed. May disaster destroy these men of violence.

12-13. I know that the Lord will defend His suffering people and bring justice to the poor. Those who love You will thank You and praise Your name. Someday they will live in Your presence forever.

A Prayer Against Wickedness

141 Lord, I'm crying out to You for help. Hear my voice! Quick! Come and rescue me! Let my prayer be like incense, and my outstretched arms like the evening sacrifice.

3-4. Lord, help me control my tongue. Help me watch what I say. Don't let me give in to temptation to do evil. Help me not to make friends with the wicked by doing what they do.

5. May I listen to good men when they correct me in kindness. Their rebuke is like perfumed oil on my head. I will not turn against it. My prayer is against the deeds of the wicked.

6-7. Someday all evil rulers will be thrown down. Then they will know that my words were true when I said, "The God of Israel is powerful. He breaks the bones of the wicked the way a plowman breaks up the soil."

8-10. Lord, I have fixed my eyes on You. I trust You. Don't leave me. Save me from the snares of my enemies, from the trap they have set for me. Let them be caught in their own snares while I escape.

A Prayer for Relief

142 I cry to the Lord for help. I take my troubles to Him in prayer. When I'm ready to give up, He knows what to do. My enemies have laid another trap for me. When I'm in danger I look around for help, but no one is there. There's no safe place to hide. No one cares about me.

5-7. You're my protector, Lord. All I want in life is to serve You. Please listen to me and help me. I'm ready to give up. Deliver me from those who are after me. They're much stronger than I am. Rescue me so that I can be free to praise Your name. Then good

people will surround me because of Your goodness to me.

A Prayer for Deliverance

143 Hear my prayer, Lord. Please listen to me. You are faithful and righteous. Don't take me to Your court and judge me, because no one can stand before You as righteous.

3-4. Lord, my enemies are after me. They want to kill me. I have to go and hide in caves to get away from them. I'm forced to live in darkness like those who have been buried. I'm ready to give up. I can't take it anymore.

5-7. I remember what You did long ago. I often think about Your power in creation. I long for Your presence just as dry ground longs for rain. Lord, please answer me. I've almost lost all hope. Please, don't hide from me, or I'll die.

8-12. May the morning light bring the comfort of Your love. I'm putting all my trust in You. Please show me what to do. My life is in Your hands. Save me from my enemies. Help me to do Your will, no matter what. For Your sake, Lord, rescue me. Stop my enemies, for I am Your servant.

The Lord Is Our Rock

144 Praise the Lord! He is my rock. He helps me train for war and teaches me how to do battle. His goodness is better than a strong tower. He is my shield. I go to Him for help. He subdues nations and puts their people under my control.

3-4. Lord, who are we that You should even notice us? Why are we important to You? Compared to You, man's life is like a puff of wind. His years are like a passing shadow.

5-8. Lord, put Your foot on the mountains and set them on fire. Send flashes of lightning like arrows and

scatter our enemies. Reach down and pull me out of this sea of attacking men. Save me from these foreigners. They are liars who shake our hands and then turn around and attack us.

9-11. Lord, after our victory I will write a new song. I will sing it for You as I play on my harp. It will be about You, the one who gave us the victory and delivered His servant David. Save me from my enemies, those foreigners who lie under oath.

12. When the war is over, may our sons grow up as sturdy trees and our daughters as shapely pillars carved for a palace.

13-15. May our barns be filled, and may our sheep multiply by the thousands. May our oxen work the fields without the danger of invading armies. May there be no more crying and screaming in our streets. Happy will be the people whose God is the Lord.

God Is Worthy of Praise

145 I will praise You, Lord. You are my God and king. I will bless Your name forever. Every day I will thank You for what You have done. I will praise You as long as I live. The Lord is great and worthy of praise. His greatness is beyond understanding.

4-7. Every generation will know about Your awesome deeds and will tell their children about Your mighty acts. They will remember Your goodness and sing of Your kindness.

8-13. The Lord is gracious and kind. He is compassionate and full of mercy. He is good to everyone. Lord, all Your works will praise You. Your people will bless You and tell others of Your mighty acts and the glories of Your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and will endure from generation to generation.

14-16. The Lord helps those who fall, and lifts the load of those who are burdened. All living things look to the Lord for food. He opens His hand and satisfies them all.

17-20. The Lord is righteous in whatever He does. He comes close to those who call on Him, who seek Him with all their hearts. He fulfills the desire of those who honor Him and hears their cry. He watches over all who love Him, but He will not save the wicked.

21. As long as I live I will praise the Lord. Let everyone who lives praise His holy name forever.

Happiness in the Lord

146 Praise the Lord! Praise His holy name! I will praise the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises to my God the rest of my life.

3-5. Don't put your trust in kings and rulers or in anyone else, because they can't save you. People die and they're gone. But happy are those who depend on the Lord, who put their hope in the God of Israel.

6-7. The Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them. The Lord keeps His promises. He carries out justice, feeds the hungry, and sets the prisoners free.

8-9. He gives sight to the blind and takes the load from people's shoulders. He loves those who want to do right. He watches over the foreigners among us and comforts widows and orphans. But He sets Himself against the plans of the wicked.

10. The Lord is king forever. Your God, O Jerusalem, will reign for all generations.

Praise God for His Word

147 Praise the Lord! It's good to sing praises to the Lord, for He is good and gracious. It is pleasant and right to praise Him.

2-3. The Lord is rebuilding Jerusalem. He brought the exiles back home. He heals the brokenhearted and wraps the wounds of those who are hurt.

4-6. He counts the stars of heaven and gives each one its name. Our God is great and powerful. His wisdom and understanding have no limits. He responds to the humble, but rejects the proud.

7-11. Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving. Make music on your harps. He puts clouds in the sky and waters the earth. He makes grass to grow and feeds the animals and birds. He's not impressed with the strength of a horse or the bravery of men. But He loves those who respect Him and put their hope in His mercy.

12-14. Praise the Lord! Praise Him, all you who live in Jerusalem. The Lord is your strong defense. He blesses you and your children. He brings peace to your land and gives you the finest crops.

15-18. He tells the earth what to do, and it obeys. He covers the earth with snow like a wool blanket. He sends hail as hard as stone from the sky. Who can stand against Him? He tells the warm winds to blow; the ice melts, and the rivers flow.

19-20. He gave His word to His people and His laws to Israel. He has not done this for other nations, because they have not known His laws.

Praise the Lord of Creation

148 Praise the Lord! Praise Him from the heavens. Praise Him, you angels.

Praise Him, sun, moon, and stars.
Praise Him throughout the universe.

5-6. Let everything praise the name of the Lord. He spoke, and all things came into being. Everything was made to last. His law will never change. What He says is forever.

7-12. Praise the Lord, you mighty creatures of the sea. Praise Him, lightning and clouds, wind and snow. Praise Him, hills and mountains, trees and forests, animals and birds, and all creatures large and small. Praise Him, you kings of the earth, rulers and judges. Praise Him, young men and women, old men and children.

13-14. Let everyone and everything praise the Lord. His name alone is great. His glory is greater than heaven and earth. He made His people strong. He should be praised by Israel, a people close to His heart. Praise the Lord!

Praise God for Victory

149 Praise the Lord! Write a new song and sing to the Lord. Praise Him in large and small congregations. Let Israel rejoice in their Creator, and the people

be glad that He is their king. Praise His name and make music with the harp and other instruments.

4-5. The Lord takes pleasure in His people. He covers the humble with the beauty of salvation. Let His people be glad and sing for joy, even in bed!

6-9. Let praise be on their lips and swords in their hands as they go into battle. They will punish wicked nations, put evil kings in chains and their nobles in iron. They will carry out the judgment of God on them. Praise the Lord for honoring His people. Praise the Lord!

Let All Things Praise the Lord

150 Praise the Lord! Praise Him in His sanctuary. Praise Him throughout the heavens. Praise Him for His mighty deeds and for His greatness and power.

3-6. Praise Him with the sound of trumpets. Praise Him with harps and flutes. Praise Him with crashing cymbals. Let everything that breathes praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!

Proverbs

INTRODUCTION: *Almost all the proverbs were written by Solomon. Only a few were written by others. God gave us this book to help us make wise decisions. It tells us how to make friends, what kind of friends to choose, what families should do, and how to manage money. It tells us about the importance of doing right, caring for poor people, and many other things that are good to know. Everyone can use the wisdom in this book, even those who are not Christians.*

Proverbs Gives Understanding

1 These are the proverbs of Solomon, son of David and king of Israel. They will give you insight, understanding, and wisdom. They will help you to be just, honest, and fair.

4-6. They will help young people know what to do and not to do. They will give wisdom to the educated and knowledge to the wise. They will give counsel and guidance to those who want to learn.

7. Respect for the Lord is where wisdom begins. Only fools refuse to listen to Him.

Counsel to a Son

8-9. Son, listen to your father and don't go against what your mother has taught you. The advice of God-loving parents will make you a good person. It will bring honor and be like a gold chain around your neck.

10-14. My son, when evil people invite you to go along with them, don't go. They say, "Come, let's have some fun and rob some people. If they resist, we'll kill them and throw them into a pit. Soon we'll have all the money we need. Come, and we'll give you a share in what we get."

15-16. Son, don't listen to them.

Don't get involved in that sort of thing. Their evil way of having fun is wrong.

17-19. You can't catch a bird with a net when it's watching you, because it senses danger. Wicked people trap themselves. That's what happens to those who are greedy, who rob and kill to get rich. They end up losing their own life.

20-25. Wisdom is like a beautiful woman. She has a booth in the marketplace with wonderful things to sell. She announces: "How long do you want to be foolish? How long will you laugh at me? When I reached out to you, you turned away. You didn't want me to correct you."

26-30. "So when you get into trouble, don't blame me. Why is it that when you're overwhelmed with fear or disaster strikes, then you call on me? I will not answer you, because you didn't respect and obey the Lord. And you didn't listen to me when I tried to correct you."

31-33. "You will have to learn from your own mistakes. People do foolish things, and some get killed. But those who listen to me don't have to worry. They will have peace in their hearts and won't have to be afraid."

The Value of Wisdom

2 Son, listen to me, and don't forget my rules. Listen to wisdom and understand. Hunt for wisdom as you would for hidden treasure. Then you'll know what it means to respect God, and you will learn where wisdom comes from. God is the source of all knowledge and wisdom. He gives wisdom to those who want to do right.

8-11. He protects those who treat others fairly and watches over those who are loyal to Him. When you love God, you will know what is honest, fair, and right. Wisdom will be in your heart; good judgment will walk by your side and keep you safe.

12-15. Wisdom will keep you from being deceived and will protect you from listening to evil people. She will keep you away from those who lie, who do wrong, and who are dishonest.

16-19. Wisdom will protect you from women who use sweet words to tempt you to do wrong. She will protect you from those who promised to love God but have turned away from Him. If you keep going to their houses, they will take you away from the path of life and will lead you to death.

20-22. Walk in the way of good men and do the right thing. You'll live in the land that God will give to the upright. But the wicked will not be there. Those who keep on sinning will be cut off and will be gone forever.

Don't Depend on Yourself

3 Son, don't forget what I've told you. Take it to heart. If you do, you'll live a long and peaceful life. Don't let mercy and truth slip away from you. Hang them around your neck. Put them in your mind. When you do, people will appreciate you.

5-8. Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Don't depend on your own un-

derstanding. Put God first in all you do, and He will direct your life. Don't be fooled into thinking that you're so smart. Respect the Lord and stay away from wickedness. If you do, it will help you to be healthy and strong.
9-10. Honor the Lord in all you do. Bring Him your tithes and offerings. He will bless you for it.

11-12. Don't turn away from the discipline of the Lord or resent being corrected by Him. The Lord disciplines only those He cares about, just as a good father cares about the kind of adults his children grow up to be.

13-18. Happy are those who find wisdom and understanding. True wisdom is better than silver and gold. It's worth more than diamonds and rubies. Wisdom offers a long and happy life. It also offers honor and wealth. Wisdom brings peace, and her ways are pleasant. Wisdom is a tree of life to those who eat her fruit. They will be glad they did.

19-20. God created the heavens and the earth with wisdom and understanding. He divided the water vapors above from those below, and caused the dew and rain to water the dry ground.

21-27. Son, hold on to wisdom and common sense. They will give you life and grace. You will walk safely through life without falling. You will not be afraid at night, and your sleep will be sweet. Have confidence in God. He will hold on to you and will not let you slip from His hand. Don't hold back from doing good when it's possible for you to do so.

28-31. Don't tell those who ask for help that you'll help them some other time. Don't take advantage of your neighbor. He trusts you. Don't argue with people for no reason if they've done nothing to hurt you. Don't be

jealous of the wicked or what they do. **32-35.** The Lord hates evil, but He places confidence in those who do good. The Lord can't bless the wicked, but He does bless those who do right. The Lord is not happy with the proud, but He is pleased with the humble. He will bless the wise, but He is ashamed of the foolish.

Wisdom Protects You

4 Children, listen to me. Pay attention to what your father says. I'm telling you what is good. Don't turn away.

3-6. When I was a boy growing up, I was my mother's only child. My father taught me, saying, "Son, don't forget my words. Don't turn your back on wisdom. She'll protect you. Love her, and she will guide you.

7-9. "Wisdom is the most important thing to have. If it costs everything you have, get godly wisdom. Put her first in your life, and she'll honor you. Love her, and she will honor you. She'll be like a crown of victory on your head, a crown of life forever."

10-13. So listen, son. Accept what I have to say, and you'll live a long and happy life. I've taught you wisely and guided you along right paths. If you go this way, you won't stumble or fall. Hold on to what I'm telling you and don't let go. Follow my instructions; they will give you life.

14-17. Don't do what the wicked do. Stay away from them. Don't be tempted by their suggestions. Turn and leave. They've made up their minds to do evil. They stay awake at night thinking of how to take advantage of people. They are wicked and violent.

18-19. The path that good people take is like the sunrise, which gets brighter as the day goes on. But the way of the wicked is like the darkness

of the night. They can't see that their actions are evil.

20-22. Son, open your ears and listen to what I'm telling you. Don't let wisdom out of your sight. Keep understanding close to your heart. They are life and health to you.

23-24. Guard your heart, because what you're attached to will decide your life. Watch what you say and how you say it. Never use bad language or speak in anger.

25-27. Focus on what is good and right. Think about which direction you're going, and stay on solid ground. Don't turn to the right or the left. And don't go down the road of wickedness.

Warnings Against Sin

5 Son, listen to what I'm telling you, so that you'll know what to do.

3-6. A wicked woman can speak words that are kind and smooth. If you listen to her, she will bring you nothing but trouble. It will be like digging your own grave. What she wants you to do isn't right, and she doesn't want you to know it's wrong.

7-9. So listen to what I'm telling you. Stay away from such a woman. Don't even go near her house, or she'll invite you in. If you listen to her, you'll regret it.

10-14. That kind of life will take your health and wealth. Then it will be too late to realize that you should have listened to me or your teachers. You will come to ruin while living among God's people.

15-20. Enjoy your own home. Don't go home with strangers and sleep at their house. You belong to the Lord, not to them. Enjoy your own family. Be faithful to the wife of your youth. Love her with all your heart.

21-23. The Lord knows your ways. One day the wicked will have to face what they have done. Feeling independent and sinning doesn't really set a man free; it puts him in chains. He will die in his sin, because he didn't listen and will be lost forever.

Don't Be Foolish

6 Son, don't be foolish enough to promise to back up someone who gets a bank loan. If you have done so, then go to the bank and humbly tell them that you've changed your mind. Do it as soon as you can; don't wait. Pray that they'll listen. Free yourself as quickly as you possibly can.

Don't Be Lazy

6-8. Watch the ants and learn how to work from them. No one shows them how to provide food for themselves. No one is telling them what to do. Yet they know how to prepare for winter. **9-11.** How long will lazy people lie around waiting for someone to tell them what to do? No one will come to their house to wake them up and tell them to go to work. A little extra sleep in the morning, a few naps during the day, and a little fun late at night causes poverty to come like a thief. Before they know it, they're poor.

Wickedness

12-15. Wicked people use body signals to deceive others. Even while they're talking to you, they're thinking of ways to cause trouble. But one day all this will catch up with them. They're destroying themselves and don't know it.

Seven Bad Things

16-19. Seven things the Lord does not like. First is pride, then dishonesty, shedding innocent blood, thinking up

wicked schemes, being in a hurry to sin, telling lies, and sowing suspicion among friends.

Don't Forget

20-23. My son, listen to your father. Don't forget what your mother taught you. Keep their counsel close to your heart. Wherever you go, their advice will guide you. At night it will protect you; during the day it will help you. Their insights are like a light at night. Correction and discipline are part of life.

24-29. What you have been told will keep you away from bad company. Don't believe what a wicked woman says. Don't be taken in by her beauty. She will ruin you. It's like putting hot coals under your shirt or walking on hot coals with bare feet. You will surely get burned.

30-31. No one condemns a thief for stealing food because he's hungry. But if he's caught, he'll still have to pay for what he did, even if it costs everything he has.

32-35. If a man spends the night with another man's wife, he'll destroy his reputation. People won't trust him anymore, but will always remember what he did. The woman's husband will find a way to get even. No amount of money can stop his anger.

Don't Get Trapped

7 Son, listen to your father's advice. Practice what I've told you. Value my teachings as you value your own eyes. Write what I've told you on your heart. Tie them like a string around your finger. Make wisdom your sister and understanding your closest friend. They will keep you from being enticed into sin.

6-9. One day I looked out the window and saw some young men standing on

the street. As they split up to go home, one of them walked by a certain woman's house. It was evening, and the sun was setting.

10-14. The woman came out and called to him. She was appealingly dressed. She went over and hugged him and invited him into her house. She told him that she had gone to the Temple that morning to sacrifice a lamb, and had some meat left over.

15-20. She said that when she looked out the window and saw him, she liked him. So she decided to invite him in. She kept telling him how beautiful and comfortable her house was. She urged him to come in and spend the night with her, because her husband was out of town.

21-23. With this kind of talk she persuaded him to accept her invitation. When he hesitated, she took him by the hand and led him into the house. Like an ox going to the slaughter or a deer waiting for the arrow to hit it, he stepped into her trap. Sin will take hold of him like a bird caught in a net. He doesn't know that it will cost him his life.

24-27. Son, listen to me and pay attention to what I'm telling you. Don't let a wicked woman play on your emotions and turn you away from what is good. Turn away from her. She has done this to some very strong men. Her house is a death trap.

The Source of Wisdom

8 Listen! Wisdom is calling to everyone. She stands in the city streets and in the marketplace saying, "Listen, all leaders and people! Do you lack wisdom? Do you need understanding? Then come and get it!

6-8. "Listen! I'm going to show you what is right and good. I'm going to tell you the truth. Everything I say is

just. There is nothing crooked or false in what I tell you.

9-12. "Those who want to understand will know that my words are true and that what I say is right. Value what I say as you would silver and gold. Wisdom is more precious than diamonds. I live with my sister, Good Judgment. We can give you insight and understanding.

13-14. "To respect God is to hate evil. Wisdom does not like pride and a filthy mouth. Wisdom gives good counsel and sound advice.

15-21. "I guide kings and rulers to make just laws. I help judges make good decisions. Those who seek me will find me. I bring them prosperity and honor, which is better than silver and gold. I help them know right from wrong. Their houses are filled with good things.

22-28. "My Master, the Lord, is the source of all wisdom. He says, 'I have been with God from the very beginning. I was there when this world was made, when the oceans appeared and the mountains were shaped. I was there when the sky appeared and the clouds were put in place.

29-31. "'I was beside God when He decided to make the earth and set boundaries for the oceans. I was His builder. I loved being by His side. I rejoiced in the creation of this world and delighted in its first people.'"

32-36. Son, listen to me. Happy are those who walk in the way of wisdom. So listen to what wisdom is telling you. She's saying, "Happy are those who wait at my door. Those who search for me will receive eternal life. God will also be pleased. Those who turn away from me will only hurt themselves and will die forever."

Wisdom Has Seven Pillars

9 Wisdom has a house with seven pillars. She has prepared food, and her table is ready for guests. She has sent out her servants to invite people to come and eat. She says, "Everyone who wants good judgment, come and eat. Let go of your foolishness and come and walk in the way of understanding."

7-9. "If you try to correct a proud person, you'll get hurt. But if you correct a wise man, he will love you. He will listen and become even wiser. Teach a just man, and he'll increase in learning."

10-12. "To respect the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Knowing God and having Him in your heart will give you understanding. If you eat from my table, years will be added to your life. If you live wisely, you'll be rewarded. If you turn away from wisdom, you will suffer loss."

13-18. Son, foolishness is like a woman who sits on her porch or in important places in the city. She calls out, "Come, have a free meal. It's foolish to work so much. Stolen fruit always tastes better than the fruit you buy." Some people listen to her and don't realize that it's a trap from which there's no escape. Their lives will end in shame.

Short Sayings of Solomon

10 Wise children make their parents glad, but foolish children make them sad.

2. Money gotten dishonestly doesn't bring lasting happiness, but doing what's right leads to eternal life.

3. The Lord doesn't go around making good people hungry, but He does stop the wicked from prospering forever.

4. A lazy man will soon be poor, but hard work brings its own reward.

5. A wise man harvests his crops

when they're ready, but the man who takes a vacation during harvest is a disgrace.

6. The man who loves God is happy and shows it by his words. A wicked man uses words to cover up what he has done.

7. Good people will be remembered, but the name of a wicked man is not welcome.

8-9. Sensible people listen to advice, but fools come to ruin. Honest people feel secure, but those who are dishonest are prisoners of their own lies.

10. One who winks with his eyes to deceive brings on trouble, and one who talks but doesn't listen will come to ruin.

11. The words of good people are like a fountain of living water, but the words of the wicked bring on anger and violence.

12. Hatred stirs up trouble, but love forgives and covers wrongs.

13. Those who speak with understanding are wise, but those who lack good judgment will be punished.

14. Wise men store up knowledge, but fools talk all the time.

15. Prosperity is like a fortified city that keeps out trouble, but when prosperity goes, the poor suffer first.

16. If you do what's right, it brings abundant life. If you do what's wrong, it brings guilt and punishment.

17. The one who listens when corrected is on the path to life, but he who doesn't listen will go astray.

18. A man who covers up his hatred with kind words is lying, and he who gossips about others is a fool.

19. The more a person talks and doesn't listen, the more he is likely to sin, but he who listens first and then talks is wise.

20. A good man's words are like gold, but a wicked man's word is worthless.

21-22. The words of good people give hope, but the words of a fool hurt people. The Lord's blessings are abundant; He never adds sorrow.

23. Fools love mischief as if it were a sport, but smart people find pleasure in wisdom.

24-25. One day wicked people will get what they don't want, while righteous people will receive what they most desire.

26. The way smoke irritates the eyes—that's the way a lazy person irritates those who hired him.

27-28. Respecting the Lord adds years to your life, but the years of the violent will be shortened. The hopes of the righteous bring joy, but the hopes of the wicked will end.

29. The way of the Lord gives strength, but those who do evil will lose His protection.

30. The righteous will never perish, but someday the wicked will be gone.

31-32. Good people continue to speak wisdom, but those who speak evil will be stopped. The righteous say what is good, but the mouths of the wicked tell lies.

Short Sayings of Solomon

11 The Lord hates dishonest measurements, but an honest scale makes Him happy.

2. The proud will fall, but wisdom comes to the humble.

3. Honesty will guide the upright, but the wicked are destroyed by their lies.

4. Money will be worthless when the Lord comes, but doing what's right is a safeguard against death.

5. Being blameless brings peace, but the wicked are destroyed by their own evil.

6. Being good brings freedom, but sinners are trapped in their deeds.

7-8. When a wicked man dies, his

hope is gone and so are his riches. Those who do right will be delivered, but the wicked will be destroyed.

9. A hypocrite thinks nothing of hurting people by what he says, but good people will tell the truth to end rumors.

10-11. When good men rule a city, the people are happy; when wicked men are put out of office, people celebrate. A city prospers when ruled by the upright, but it comes to ruin when managed by the wicked.

12. He who lacks wisdom criticizes his neighbors, but he who has good judgment controls his tongue.

13. He who betrays confidence is called a gossip, but he who can be trusted knows how to keep quiet.

14. By a ruler's bad judgment a whole nation can fall, but in the advice of many good counselors there is safety.

15. Those who promise to help pay a stranger's debt will live to regret it, but those who refuse to get involved are safe.

16. A gracious woman will be treated with respect; she can hold on to honor as men hold on to wealth.

17. A kind man will reap blessings, but a cruel man troubles his own family.

18-19. Wicked people don't gain anything, but the righteous will be rewarded. They will live forever, but the wicked will die.

20. The Lord hates the schemes of the wicked, but He is happy over the ways of the upright.

21. The wicked will not escape the results of their wickedness, but those who do right will be free.

22. A beautiful woman without good judgment is like a gold ring in a pig's nose.

23. The wishes of good people will be fulfilled, but the hopes of the wicked will be gone forever.

24-25. One man is generous and pros-

pers, while another keeps his money and loses everything. Generous people prosper because they help others. Others help them when they need it.

26. People don't like those who hold on to their harvest until the price of grain goes up, but they bless the man who sells it anytime they need it.

27. He who looks for good will find it and he who looks for evil will find it too.

28. Whoever puts his trust in money will fall, but those who trust in the Lord will flourish.

29. He who brings trouble on his family will inherit disaster. Those who act foolishly will end up working for the wise.

30. The fruit of righteousness is eternal life; those who bring others to the Lord are wise.

31. Good people experience a little taste of heaven while on earth; the wicked have a little taste of their future too.

Short Sayings of Solomon

12 He who loves to learn will also love correction, but He who hates correction is foolish.

2. The Lord approves what good men do, but He condemns what wicked men do.

3. A wicked man will not be remembered, but a good man will not be forgotten.

4. A good wife is an honor to her husband, but a bad wife brings him shame.

5-7. The advice of the righteous is good, but the counsel of the wicked is bad. Righteous people are interested in helping you, but the wicked are out to get what they can from you. The wicked will be overthrown, but the righteous will stand.

8. A wise man will be praised, but a man of poor judgment will be avoided.

9. It's better to have less with a servant than to pretend to have more and not have enough to eat.

10. A good man cares for his animals, but a wicked man is cruel to them.

11. He who works has food to eat, but he who neglects his work to do other things is not thinking straight.

12. The wicked long for the riches of this world, but the righteous long for the riches that God gives.

13-14. A wicked man will be snared by his own sinful talk, but a good man will be careful of what he says. He will be glad he did so.

15-16. What a fool does seems right to him, but a wise man listens to others. A fool is quickly upset by insults, but a wise man ignores them.

17. Those who tell the truth can be trusted, but those who are dishonest can't.

18. Hurtful words wound like a knife, but kind words bring healing.

19-20. Truthful lips will last, but lying lips will not. Deception is in the hearts of the wicked, but joy is in the hearts of those who bring peace.

21. Good people don't plan evil things, but bad people are filled with mischief.

22. God is not pleased with those who lie, but is happy with those who are honest.

23. A wise man doesn't make a show of what he knows, but a fool says whatever comes to his mind.

24. Busy hands bring advancement, but lazy hands don't.

25. Worry makes a man's heart heavy, but kind words cheer him up.

26. A good man turns his friends away from evil, but a wicked man leads them into sin.

27. A lazy man doesn't finish what he started, but a good man works diligently until the job is done.

28. The way of righteousness is a happy life, and immortality waits at the end.

Short Sayings of Solomon

13 A wise son listens to his father, but a foolish son rejects correction.

2. A good man will speak good things, but the wicked like to talk about violence.

3. He who values life is careful in what he says, but he who talks without thinking will ruin his life.

4. A lazy man never gets what he wants, but a hardworking man gets what he goes after.

5. Honest people hate lying, but wicked people think nothing of it.

6. Doing right protects a man's reputation, but wickedness will ruin him.

7. Some people act as if they're rich when they're not, while others act as if they're poor when they're rich.

8. A rich man may have to pay to save his life, but a poor man is never threatened.

9. The life of those who do right is like a shining light, but the life of the wicked is like a light going out.

10. Pride leads to arguments, but wisdom listens and asks for advice.

11. The more easily money is made, the harder it is not to spend it; but the harder it is to get, the easier it is to save.

12. When hopes are crushed, the heart feels sick, but when hopes are fulfilled, it's like eating from the tree of life.

13. He who turns away from instruction will have trouble, but he who appreciates it will be rewarded.

14. The teachings of a wise man are like a fountain of life; they keep those who listen from wickedness.

15. Good judgment brings respect, but the life of the disobedient is hard.

16. People with good sense think before they act, but foolish people show how little sense they have.

17. A messenger that can't be trusted is nothing but trouble, but a trust-

worthy one brings messages of help and healing.

18. Those who don't learn will be poor, but those who listen and learn will be honored.

19. A desire accomplished is sweet, but fools refuse to turn from evil and do good.

20. Those who keep company with the wise become wise, but those who keep company with fools will be ruined.

21. Trouble follows the sinner wherever he goes, but reward follows the righteous.

22. A good man will leave something to his children and grandchildren, but the wealth of the wicked will one day be given to those who are good.

23. A man's farm may produce good crops, but injustice by others can take it all away.

24. If you don't discipline your children, it shows that you don't care. If you really love them, you'll correct them.

25. Good people are content with what they have, but the wicked are never satisfied.

Short Sayings of Solomon

14 Strong families are built by wise mothers, but mothers who are foolish tear their families apart.

2. Those who are honest respect God, but those who are deceptive are not reverent.

3. A fool talks without thinking and ruins his reputation, but a wise man keeps his word.

4. Without animals to pull the plow, the barn stays empty, but when the plow is used, the barn becomes full.

5. A reliable witness will tell the truth, but a false witness will tell lies.

6. Those who make fun of wisdom never find it, but it comes easily to those with understanding.

7. Don't keep company with fools, because you won't learn anything worthwhile.

8. The wise know what is right and do it, but fools deceive themselves.

9. Those who don't care whether they sin or not are fools, but when good people sin, they confess and make things right.

10. No one can really know another person's sadness, and no one can fully experience someone else's joy.

11. The wicked will be destroyed, but the righteous will live forever.

12. There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end of it is death.

13. Even when people are laughing, their hearts can be sad, because when it's over, their sadness is still there.

14. Bad people will be paid back for what they have done, but good people will be rewarded for doing good.

15. A fool believes anything and charges ahead, but a wise man thinks ahead before doing anything.

16. A wise man respects the Lord and stays away from evil, but a fool is hot-tempered and reckless.

17. A quick-tempered man does foolish things, but a wise man does what is good.

18. Foolish people get what they deserve, but the wise are rewarded with knowledge.

19. The time will come when the wicked will bow before those who are good.

20-21. Poor people are shunned by their neighbors, but rich people have many friends. Those who look down on the poor are sinning, but those who are kind to them make God happy.

22. Those who do evil will come to ruin. But those who do good will find love and happiness.

23. Hard work brings profit, but all talk and no work leads to poverty.

24. Wise men are praised for their wis-

dom, but fools reap more foolishness.

25. A witness who tells the truth saves lives, but a false witness tells lies and doesn't care.

26. Respect for the Lord gives confidence to a man and a sense of security to his children.

27. Respect for the Lord is like a fountain of life, because it turns a man away from evil.

28. The greatness of a king depends on how many people he rules, because without people he can't be a king.

29. If you stay calm, it shows you're wise, but if you're easily irritated, people will avoid you.

30. A heart full of peace gives life, but envy rots the bones.

31. If you mistreat the poor, you show disrespect for God, but whoever is kind to the poor honors God.

32. Wicked people bring about their own destruction, but the hope of the righteous is eternal life.

33. Wisdom lives in the heart of the wise, but not in the heart of fools.

34. Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

35. A king is happy to have a wise servant, but he disciplines one who shows poor judgment.

Short Sayings of Solomon

15 A gentle answer calms anger, but harsh words make it worse.
2. When a wise man speaks, it makes sense, but when a fool speaks, it doesn't.

3. The Lord knows everything that happens, both the good and bad.

4. An honest tongue is like a tree of life, but lying crushes people's spirits.

5. A fool ignores what his father tells him, but he who listens is wise.

6. The house of a good man is full of goodness, but the house of a wicked man is full of trouble.

7. Knowledge is given by the wise, not by fools.

8-9. The Lord is not pleased with the large sacrifices people bring as much as He is pleased with the simple prayers of those who love Him. The Lord does not like the behavior of the wicked, but He loves those who are trying to do what's right.

10. Discipline is for those who do what's wrong. Those who hate correction will perish.

11. If the Lord can see into the grave, how much more can He see into the hearts of those who are living.

12. Fools shun correction and resent advice from the wise.

13. A happy heart makes a cheerful face, but a sad heart crushes a happy spirit.

14. Intelligent people want to learn, but fools don't care.

15. Every day is hard for those who are depressed, but to those who are cheerful, every day is full of joy.

16. It's better to have less with the presence of the Lord than to be rich without Him.

17. A tossed salad with love is better than a feast with hatred.

18. A hot temper brings on arguments, but a kind word stops all strife.

19. A lazy man's life is filled with thorns, but an honest man's life is like an open highway.

20. A wise son makes his parents glad, but a fool is a source of grief.

21. Fools delight in foolishness, but those who are wise delight in what is good.

22. Plans fail for lack of good counsel, but many counselors bring success.

23. It's good to give the right answer, but even better to use the right words at the right time and say them in the right spirit.

24. Good people walk the path that

leads to life and avoid the path that leads to death.

25. The Lord will destroy the house of the proud, but watch over the property of the widow.

26. God is not pleased with the thoughts of the wicked, but He delights in the thoughts of the righteous.

27. A greedy man brings trouble on his family, but the man who refuses to do wrong will have a happy home.

28. Good people think before they speak, but evil comes from the mouths of the wicked.

29. The Lord listens to those who try to do right, but He is far from those who live wickedly.

30. A cheerful face makes others happy, and good news refreshes the spirit.

31-32. He who receives correction feels at home with the wise and will grow in understanding, but he who refuses correction hurts himself.

33. Wisdom teaches a man to respect the Lord, and humility comes before honor.

Short Sayings of Solomon

16 A man prepares to give an answer, but only the Lord can help him say it right.

2. What a man does may seem innocent to him, but the Lord weighs the motives.

3. Commit everything you do to the Lord, and He will help you to be successful.

4. Everything in the Lord's plan has a destiny; the destiny of the wicked is total destruction.

5. The Lord will not accept those who are proud, and even if they join forces, they will be destroyed.

6. Because of God's mercy and love our sins are forgiven, but when a man respects the Lord, he will turn from evil.

7. When a man lives to please the Lord, even his enemies leave him alone.

8. It's better to have a little, honestly earned, than to have much gained dishonestly.

9. A man may plan his life, but the Lord directs his steps.

10. The king's authority is almost as powerful as the Lord's, so what he says should be just and good.

11. To be honest in business pleases the Lord no matter what the situation.

12. It's a sin for rulers to do evil; only rightdoing can make a nation strong.

13. Rulers appreciate good people and value those who are honest.

14. The anger of a king is a sign of death, but those who are wise know how to calm him down.

15. When the king is happy, it affects the whole country. His kindness is like a gentle rain on dry ground.

16. To get wisdom is better than gold. To have understanding is better than silver.

17. Good people travel the good road avoiding evil, and he who knows where he's going will preserve his life.

18. Pride leads to self-destruction and arrogance to a man's downfall.

19. It's better to be humble and poor than to be proud and live in luxury.

20. Whoever handles matters wisely will find success, and he who depends on the Lord will be happy.

21. A wise man has a good reputation; the kinder his words, the more powerful his teaching.

22. Understanding is a fountain of life to those who have it, but correcting a fool accomplishes nothing.

23. Intelligent people think before they speak, so that what they say is well received.

24. Kind words are like honey, sweet to the taste and healthful to the body.

25. There is a way that seems right to

a man, but without the Lord, the end is death.

26. Hunger makes a man work harder so he can get paid and get something to eat.

27. Wicked people are always thinking up ways to do evil; the plans on their lips are like a burning fire.

28. Wicked people cause trouble, just as gossip separates the best of friends.

29. A wicked man deceives his neighbors and leads his friends to do wrong.

30. He who smacks his lips over his plans for evil has already done it in his mind.

31. Gray hair is a crown of glory to those who do right.

32. He who is slow to anger is stronger than a mighty warrior; it is better to control your emotions than to conquer a city.

33. People draw lots to see what the Lord wants them to do, but God's will is not found in such ways.

Short Sayings of Solomon

17 It's better to eat a dry piece of bread with peace and quiet than to have a banquet with strife and arguments.

2. A wise servant helps train his master's son; he will receive a share of the inheritance as if he were one of the children.

3. Gold and silver are tested and purified by fire, but the Lord tests our hearts.

4. Wrongdoers listen to liars, and liars listen to those who slander others.

5. If you make fun of poor people, you insult God. If you rejoice over someone else's misfortune, you will not go unpunished.

6. Grandchildren are the pride of their grandparents, and good parents are a blessing to their children.

7. Smooth talk by evil men is bad, but a lying ruler is worse.

8. A bribe is like a magic wand, because every time a man waves it, it works.

9. He who forgives a wrong shows love, but he who keeps talking about it breaks up the closest friendship.

10. A wise man learns more from one rebuke than a fool from 100 whippings.

11. An evil person will continue to cause trouble, which is why the toughest judge will be given his case.

12. It's better to meet a mother bear and her cubs than to meet a fool with a weapon.

13. If someone repays evil for good, trouble will never leave him.

14. Starting an argument is like putting a hole in a dam; it's better to stop the leak while it's still small.

15. The Lord hates it when innocent people are condemned and bad people go free.

16. It doesn't do any good to educate a fool, because he doesn't really want to learn.

17. A real friend will stay by you no matter what happens. What are brothers for if they don't stick together?

18. A man who promises to pay his friend's debts has no sense.

19. He who loves to argue loves sin. He who is arrogant and proud brings problems on himself.

20. No good comes from a man with an evil heart. He who tells lies will get into trouble.

21. To have a foolish son brings heartaches; it's hard for such parents to be happy.

22. A happy heart is like good medicine, but a broken spirit takes away strength.

23. Wicked people give bribes to get around the law, and wicked judges accept them.

24. An intelligent person concen-

trates on getting wisdom, but a fool lets his mind wander.

25. A foolish son brings grief to his father and sorrow to his mother.

26. To punish a righteous man is not good, nor to punish a leader for being honest.

27. An intelligent person chooses his words carefully, and a man of understanding will have a calm spirit.

28. Even a fool is thought to know a little something if he keeps his mouth shut; he's considered wise if he just sits there.

Short Sayings of Solomon

18 People who don't get along with others are interested only in themselves.

2. A fool doesn't want to understand; all he wants to do is to voice his opinion.

3. With wickedness comes shame and a loss of self-respect.

4. The words of the wise are like a refreshing stream of water.

5. It's not right to favor the guilty because they have money, or to punish the innocent because they're poor.

6. When a fool starts an argument, people feel like hitting him to shut him up.

7. A fool's mouth is his undoing; he ties himself in knots with his own words.

8. Gossip is like choice food; people are eager to eat it, but it spreads through the body like poison.

9. A lazy person is not much different from one who wastes things.

10. The Lord is like a fortified city that people run to for safety.

11. Rich people think their money protects them, but they are mistaken.

12. Pride comes before a man's fall. Before honor comes humility.

13. Listen before you speak, or you will sound like a fool, to your own disgrace.

14. A man's will to live when he's

sick helps him get well, but if that's gone, hope is gone too.

15. Those who are wise get knowledge; they listen to others to get understanding.

16. A gift opens the way and even brings the giver into the presence of important people.

17. The first one to present his case seems right to those who are listening, until the next one speaks and begins to question him.

18. If two men argue and do so equally well, casting lots will often settle the issue.

19. A brother you've offended is harder to win back than a fortified city. If you argue with him, it builds a wall between you.

20. Good words are like a good meal; you'll be glad you said them.

21. The tongue has power to give life or to bring about pain that leads to death.

22. Whoever has a good wife has a treasure; he is favored by the Lord.

23. When a poor man asks for help, he must speak softly; but a rich man answers rudely.

24. A man who wants friends must be friendly. There is one Friend who is closer to you than a brother.

Short Sayings of Solomon

19 It's better to associate with a poor man who is honest than with a rich fool.

2. It's not good to have enthusiasm without knowledge, because being hasty leads to sin.

3. By making dumb decisions a man ruins his life, but only a fool blames God for it.

4. When a man is rich, he has many friends, but when he's poor, they all leave him.

5. A false witness will be punished,

and people will not excuse a liar.

6. Many like to be friends with important people. Everyone is friendly to those who bring gifts.

7. A poor man's relatives and friends stay away even if he begs them to come.

8. He who learns all he can is doing himself a favor; and he who understands what he's learning will succeed.

9. A false witness will not get away with his deception, and he who lies will one day perish.

10. It's not good for a fool to live in luxury, nor for servants to tell princes what to do.

11. A wise man controls his temper; when someone wrongs him, he ignores it.

12. The king's anger is like the roar of a hungry lion, but when he favors someone, it's as fresh as the morning dew.

13. A foolish son can bring his father to ruin. A wife who is always picking on her husband is like a dripping faucet.

14. Money and houses can be inherited, but a good wife is a gift from the Lord.

15. Laziness just brings on more sleep, and too much sleeping makes people poor.

16. He who keeps God's commandments can be given eternal life, but he who ignores them will perish forever.

17. When a person gives money to help the poor, it's like a loan to the Lord; He will repay it.

18. Discipline your children while they are young; don't stop because they cry.

19. Let a man with a bad temper suffer the consequences; if you don't, he'll never learn.

20. Listen when someone gives you advice, and be willing to learn. It will make you that much wiser.

21. Man plans all kinds of things, but

it's the Lord's counsel that will stand.

22. People want a man to be kind. An honest poor man is better than a rich liar.

23. Respect for the Lord lengthens a man's life. Those who do so and are content save themselves a lot of trouble.

24. Some people are so lazy that it's almost as if they expect others to feed them.

25. When you punish someone who makes fun of others, the rest will see it and learn a lesson. Rebuke a wise man, and he'll learn from his mistakes.

26. Children who rob their father or don't help their mother when she's in need bring shame on themselves.

27. When a son no longer listens, he'll soon turn away from what he's learned before.

28. In his heart a false witness laughs at the law, and wicked people love the taste of evil.

29. Penalties are for those who break the law, and whippings are for fools.

Short Sayings of Solomon

20 Drinking alcohol makes people do strange things, even get into fights. Anyone who drinks is not wise.

2. An angry king is like a roaring lion. To make him mad is like committing suicide.

3. A wise man stays out of arguments, but a fool meddles in others' business.

4. A lazy farmer doesn't sow because it's cold outside; when he looks for a harvest, he will not find one.

5. A man's thoughts are like a well of water; someone with insight can draw them out.

6. Many claim to be loyal, but it isn't easy to find someone you can really trust.

7. Happy are the children who follow the example of good parents.

8. When a king sits on his throne as judge, he'll decide who's telling the truth and who is not.

9. Who can say, "I'm all clean and have never sinned"?

10. Using false weights and measurements does not make the Lord happy.

11. People know whether children are good or bad by what they do.

12. It's the Lord who gave us eyes to see and ears to hear.

13. Those who are lazy and love to sleep will soon be poor; but those who get up and go to work will have plenty to eat.

14. In the store the customer complains about the cost of a product, but when he gets home he brags about the good deal he got.

15. Gold and rubies are valuable, but wisdom and knowledge are even better.

16. If someone promises to pay another person's debt, he should get a security deposit from the borrower.

17. Making money by deceit is as tasty as a banquet, but the time will come when it will taste like a mouthful of gravel.

18. Listen to good counsel, and you will succeed. Don't go to war without getting good advice from those who know.

19. A person who gossips cannot keep a secret, so don't share anything confidential with him.

20. If you curse good parents, the light of your life will be put out in darkness.

21. Inherited money is quickly spent.

22. Don't repay a wrong done to you; leave it to the Lord, and He will vindicate you.

23. The Lord is not happy when people use dishonest scales.

24. Only the Lord can direct man's steps; how can anyone understand the way he should go?

25. It's the devil's trap to have you

make a pledge to the Lord without praying and thinking about it.

26. A wise king will find out who did wrong and will make sure that the punishment fits the crime.

27. The Holy Spirit in a person's heart is like a light to help him see himself as he really is.

28. Mercy and truth will help a king, and mercy will make his rule secure.

29. Young men are honored for their strength and older men for their wisdom.

30. Punishment takes care of evil just as a painful experience changes a person's heart.

Short Sayings of Solomon

21 The Lord can guide a king's thoughts as easily as He can guide a river, turning it wherever He chooses.

2. A man thinks that what he does is right, but the Lord knows his heart.

3. To do what is right is more important to the Lord than sacrifices and offerings.

4. Pride and arrogance is what the wicked live on, but these are sins.

5. Those who work will have what they need, but trying to get rich quickly tends to bring poverty.

6. Making a fortune by lying is like chasing the mist and leads to death.

7. Violence will destroy the wicked because they refuse to do what's right.

8. The way of the guilty is devious, but the way of the pure in heart is honest and right.

9. Better to live alone on a flat roof than in a big house with a wife who constantly argues.

10. Wicked people are hungry for more evil; they have no mercy even on their neighbors.

11. When a fool is punished, he finally learns his lesson, but all a wise man needs is to be told of his error.

12. A good man knows to stay away from the house of the wicked; God will take care of those who do evil.

13. If a man closes his ears to the cry of the poor, no one will hear his cry for help.

14. A gift will quiet anger, and a reward will soothe the nerves.

15. When justice is done, good people are glad, but the wicked are troubled.

16. A man who doesn't use common sense will soon rest with the dead.

17. He who lives only for pleasure will be poor, and those who waste their money on expensive food and drink will not get rich.

18. The wicked will suffer what they have brought on others, and sinners will pay for what they have done.

19. It's better to live alone in the desert than with someone who is always complaining and angry.

20. Those who are wise plan ahead and save, but those who are dumb spend their money as fast as they get it.

21. Be kind and honest, and you'll live a long life filled with happiness and honor.

22. A wise man knows how to take a city without a fight and how to bring down a defense in which people have trusted.

23. If you learn to control your tongue, you'll save yourself a lot of trouble.

24. Show me someone who makes fun of people, and I'll show you someone who is arrogant and proud.

25-26. A lazy man destroys himself because he refuses to work. All day long he dreams of getting rich, but another man works and gives to the needy.

27. The Lord will accept neither sacrifices and offerings brought to Him by the wicked nor those brought to Him for the wrong reason.

28. The words of a false witness will

not stand, but those of a truthful man will last.

29. The wicked are stubborn and put on a front, but good people think things through.

30. Human planning and wisdom is nothing if the Lord is against the plan.

31. You can prepare for battle, but the Lord is the one who gives victory.

Short Sayings of Solomon

22 A good reputation is better than riches, and to be loved is better than silver and gold.

2. The rich and poor have one thing in common: they have the same Creator.

3. The wise see trouble coming and avoid it, but fools keep going right into it.

4. Humility and respect for God give honor and result in a happy life.

5. Thorns and snares are in the path of the wicked; he who values life will protect himself by taking another path.

6. Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is grown, he will not forget what he was taught.

7. Just as the rich rule the poor, so he who borrows is obligated to the one who lends.

8. He who sows wickedness will reap what he sows; his power to do evil will end.

9. A generous man will be blessed, because he shares what he has with the poor.

10. Get rid of the critic who makes trouble for everyone; quarrels and insults will stop.

11. He who is honest in heart and gracious in word will have even the king as his friend.

12. The Lord watches over what's true and frustrates the plans of liars.

13. A lazy man uses excuses not to go to work: "I can't go outside, because a lion might kill me."

14. The words of a wicked woman are

like a deep pit; those who don't listen to the Lord will fall into it.

15. Sometimes children do foolish things, but the rod of correction will teach them to stop.

16. He who takes advantage of the poor to get rich and he who gives gifts to the wealthy to gain favor will both become poor.

Thirty Wise Sayings

17-19. Listen and pay attention to the words of the wise and apply them to your own heart. You will be glad that you have memorized the words of the Lord when you can say them easily. I have shared the above short sayings with you so that you will learn to put your trust in the Lord.

20-21. I decided to write thirty more sayings for you that are filled with wisdom. They are true and can be trusted, and will help you give good advice to others.

22-23. One: Don't take advantage of the poor, and don't take away the rights of people by going to court. If you do, the Lord will take a stand against you.

24-25. Two: Don't make friends with violent and hot-tempered people, and don't associate with those who are easily angered. If you do, you'll become like them and will be caught in a trap.

26-27. Three: Don't make promises you can't keep, and don't take the responsibility for someone else's debt. If you do and can't pay, the law will come and take your house and everything you have.

28. Four: Don't move property lines that have been established by your ancestors.

29. Five: Show me someone who does his work faithfully and well. This is the kind of a person who is worthy to serve kings.

Thirty Sayings Continued

23 Six: When you sit down to eat with a king or ruler, don't let your appetite run away with you, and don't be greedy when the dessert comes. If you think so much about food, you might say something you'll be sorry for.

4-5. Seven: Don't wear yourself out trying to get rich, because money has a way of sprouting wings and flying away.

6-8. Eight: Don't accept an invitation to a selfish man's house. All he'll talk about is how much food costs. By the time the meal is over, you'll wish you hadn't eaten any of it.

9. Nine: Don't try to talk sense to a fool. He'll listen only to make fun of what you say.

10-11. Ten: Don't move a property line or take away land that belongs to widows and orphans. The Lord will take His stand against you.

12. Eleven: Determine to learn all that you can, so pay attention to what your teachers tell you.

13-14. Twelve: Don't think that discipline is wrong. The right kind of spanking never killed anyone, but it may save a child from foolishness and sin.

15-16. Thirteen: Son, it makes me happy when I see you acting wisely and standing up for what's right.

17-18. Fourteen: Don't envy dishonest people who have more than you do. Let the Lord be the center of your life. He'll reward you and your life will be full of hope.

19-21. Fifteen: Son, be wise and think about where your life is going. Don't join those who love to go to parties to stuff themselves and get drunk. Such people will lose their jobs and end up in poverty.

22-25. Sixteen: Listen to your father

and don't look down on your mother when she's old. Learn the truth and don't turn away from it. Acquire wisdom, self-discipline, and understanding. Your father will be proud of you, and your mother will be happy.

26-28. Seventeen: Listen to me, son, and watch how I live. Don't give in to a wicked woman. Her trap is like a deep well. Such women are like robbers. They will take all you've got and then look for another victim.

29-35. Eighteen: Who has lots of trouble? Who is always getting into a fight? Who is getting beat up? Those who can't stop drinking. Soon their eyes don't focus and their thinking is gone. They feel seasick and say to themselves, "I feel as if someone beat me up, but I can't remember. I need another drink!"

Thirty Sayings Continued

24 Nineteen: Don't be jealous of the wicked or make friends with them. All they talk about is making trouble.

3-4. Twenty: It takes wisdom to build a house, but knowledge and understanding to establish a happy home and make it beautiful.

5-6. Twenty-one: A wise man has great influence, and knowledge gives a man an advantage. When a nation goes to war, it needs wise leaders and good counselors.

7. Twenty-two: A fool can't understand wisdom; it's too deep for him. He has nothing to say when important matters are discussed.

8-9. Twenty-three: He who is always planning to do evil will get a bad reputation. People don't like schemers and those who make fun of others.

10. Twenty-four: If you give up when the going is tough, it shows how little strength and courage you have.

11-12. Twenty-five: Help those who are being treated unfairly. If you say, "That's none of my business," God will hold you responsible for what you could have done. He rewards people who help others, and remembers those who don't.

13-14. Twenty-six: Honey is good, especially from the honeycomb. Wisdom is like honey. Once you eat it, no one can take it from you, and you will have hope for the future.

15-16. Twenty-seven: Don't be like the wicked who attack a good man's house to rob him of what he has. Calamity may come to a good man at different times, but God helps him and he always gets up. When calamity comes to the wicked, they're overwhelmed because they don't have God to lean on.

17-18. Twenty-eight: Don't be glad when someone you don't like gets into trouble, or God will not help you when you're in trouble.

19-20. Twenty-nine: Don't let wicked people worry you, and don't be jealous of them. They have no hope; they will die like the flame of a candle that's blown out.

21-22. Thirty: Respect the Lord and honor the king. Don't join those who disobey and rebel. They will be destroyed whenever God or the king decides to do so.

More Wise Sayings

23-25. It's not good for a judge to be partial. If he pronounces a guilty person innocent, people will denounce him. But a judge who is fair and who convicts the guilty, no matter who they are, will be appreciated. God will bless him.

26. An honest answer is a true sign of friendship.

27. First, do your planting and then

work on your house, not the other way around.

28-29. Don't talk about your neighbor unless you're asked to testify in court. Don't say things to get even with your neighbor. Tell the truth.

30-34. One time I walked past the field of a lazy man and past a vineyard of a man who lacked judgment. The field was full of weeds, and the stone wall protecting the vineyard was in ruins. When I saw that, I learned a lesson. A little more sleep, a few more naps, and before you know it, poverty will come on you as a robber.

Proverbs for King Hezekiah

25 These are proverbs from Solomon copied for King Hezekiah.

2-3. We stand in awe of God, because we can't understand how He can have such wisdom. We admire the king who wants more understanding. When a king is quiet, it's as hard to know what he's thinking as it is to measure the height of the sky or the depth of the ocean.

4-7. Purify silver, and you can make a thing of beauty. Remove the wicked counselors from a king's advisers, and his government will be honest and good. When you stand before a king, don't try to impress him with how important you are. It's better to be honored by him asking you to sit next to him than to be humiliated by him asking you to leave.

8. Don't be in a hurry to testify against someone in court about what you think is right. Other witnesses might prove you wrong.

9-10. If you and your neighbor have some differences, don't tell everyone. That would give you a bad reputation.

11-12. Words fitly spoken are like golden apples in a silver bowl. When

a person of experience warns you not to do something, it's like a gift of gold.

13. A faithful messenger is like a cool drink on a hot day.

14. People who make promises and don't keep them are like clouds and wind that bring no rain.

15. Patience can persuade a prince to change his mind, and gentle words can break the bones of opposition.

16. Eating too much fresh honey can make you sick.

17. Don't visit your neighbor too often, or he'll get tired of you.

18. If you falsely testify against your neighbor, it's like sticking a knife in him or hitting him with a club.

19. Depending on someone you can't trust is like chewing with a loose tooth or walking on a broken ankle.

20. Trying to cheer up someone who is in terrible pain by singing happy songs is like pouring vinegar on an open wound.

21-22. If your enemy is hungry, give him something to eat. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. When you do this, he will feel bad about hating you. And the Lord will reward you for your kindness.

23. Gossip produces hurt and anger just as a north wind brings cold and rain.

24. It's better to live on a flat roof than in a big house with a wife who likes to argue.

25. Good news from far away is like a drink of water to someone who's thirsty.

26. To see a good man giving in to evil is as depressing as seeing a mountain spring bubble up muddy water.

27. Just as eating too much honey is bad for you, so is seeking too much recognition.

28. A man without self-control is like an unprotected city.

More Proverbs for King Hezekiah

26 Praising a fool is as out of place as snow in the summer.

2. Curses can't harm you; they're like birds that never land.

3. Sometimes a horse needs a whip, and a fool needs correction that hurts.

4. Don't lower yourself to the level of a fool, or people will think you are one.

5. If a fool asks a dumb question, don't take it seriously, or he'll think he's smart.

6. You might as well cut off both your feet as to ask a fool to deliver an important message.

7. A fool can learn from a proverb about as well as a paralyzed man can use his legs.

8. Praising someone who is stupid makes as much sense as tying a stone to a slingshot.

9. A fool trying to use a wise saying is like a drunkard trying to get a splinter out of his hand.

10. A man who hires anyone who comes along is like an archer who shoots arrows without aiming.

11. A fool who repeats the same dumb thing is like a dog licking its own vomit.

12. There is more hope for a fool than for someone who thinks he knows it all.

13-14. A lazy man stays in the house as if there were lions in the street. In the morning he just turns over and goes back to sleep.

15. Some people are so lazy that when they come to eat they put their hands in their laps, as if it's too much effort to put the food into their mouths.

16. A lazy man thinks more of his own opinion than of seven wise men who give him good answers.

17. Getting involved in an argument that's none of your business is like tak-

ing hold of the ears of a vicious dog.

18-19. Like a man who shoots poison arrows wildly and without purpose, so is the man who lies to his friend and then says, "I was only joking."

20-22. Where there is no wood, the fire goes out. Where there is no gossip, arguments stop. As wood keeps the fire burning, so troublemakers keep arguments going. Gossip tastes sweet, and people devour it like dessert.

23. Kind words from evil people are like a coat of silver paint on an old pot.

24-26. An evil man pretends he's your friend when he's really not. Don't believe him, no matter how charming or kind his words are. He's covering his real intentions with lies. His wickedness will soon be seen by all.

27. A man who digs a pit to trap someone else will fall into it himself. He who tries to roll a stone on someone else will have it roll back on him.

28. Someone who lies doesn't care whom he hurts; and a flattering mouth is no help to anyone.

More Proverbs for King Hezekiah

27 Don't brag about what you're going to do tomorrow, because you don't know what tomorrow might bring.

2. Let other people praise you; don't praise yourself.

3. Carrying a heavy load is easier than carrying the troubles caused by a fool.

4. Anger and hostility are cruel, but compared to jealousy, they're nothing.

5. The wise rebuke of a friend is a demonstration of love.

6. A friend means well when he corrects you, but when an enemy puts his arm around you, watch out.

7. When a man's stomach is full, even honey doesn't taste good, but when

he's hungry, he'll eat anything, even if it tastes bitter.

8. A man away from home is like a bird without a nest.

9. Perfume makes people happy, and good counsel from a friend is sweet.

10. Don't forget your friend or your father's friend. Don't go to your brother's house for help every time something goes wrong. A good neighbor nearby is better than a brother far away.

11. Son, be wise, and you'll bring joy to your father's heart. It will give him strength to answer his critics.

12. People with good sense see troubles coming and avoid them, but a person who doesn't think will walk right into them and then regret it.

13. Anyone foolish enough to agree to help pay a stranger's debts will lose his shirt; if he does it for a woman he doesn't know, he'll lose everything.

14. To awaken a friend early in the morning with a loud voice is as bad as waking him up with a curse.

15-16. A woman who likes to nag is like constant dripping throughout the day. Trying to stop her is like trying to stop the wind or trying to grip something with oil on your hands.

17. As steel sharpens steel, so people who learn from each other sharpen their minds.

18. If you take care of your fig tree, you will have fruit. A servant who looks out for his master's things will be honored.

19. As a man's face is reflected in a mirror, so his character is reflected in what he does.

20. The grave is never satisfied, and neither are the desires of people's hearts.

21. Just as silver and gold are tested and refined, so a man's attitude is tested by the praise he receives.

22. Even if you could grind a fool like wheat, you couldn't take his foolishness out of him.

23-24. Keep an eye on your flocks and herds. They could get sick and die, and you would lose what you have. Riches don't last forever; neither is the rule of a king secure.

25-27. After the hay is harvested and the new grass appears, that's when lambs are born. They will provide meat for your family and wool for your clothes. Then you can sell some of your animals to buy more land. The rest will give you all the milk you need.

More Proverbs for King Hezekiah

28 The wicked get scared and run when no one is chasing them, but good men are as fearless as lions.

2. When a country is wicked, rulers come and go, but a leader with understanding restores goodness.

3. A ruler who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that destroys crops.

4. Those who don't respect the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law stand up against them.

5. Wicked people don't understand the meaning of justice, but those who love the Lord do.

6. It's better to be poor and honest than rich and dishonest.

7. A son who keeps the law is wise, but he who joins a gang is a disgrace to his father.

8. He who gets rich by charging high interest on loans will be punished; his riches will be given to those who got the loans.

9. If someone turns his back on God's law, even his prayer will not be heard.

10. He who leads others into sin will fall into his own pit, but those who are honest will be rewarded.

11. A rich man might think he's honest, but a poor man can see right through him.

12. When good people are in power, everyone is happy, but when the wicked are in power, people feel like hiding.

13. He who tries to cover up his sins will not prosper, but he who confesses and makes things right will be forgiven.

14. The man who respects the Lord and listens to Him will be happy, but he who is stubborn will have no end of trouble.

15. A wicked king rules like a roaring lion or a growling bear.

16. A king who lacks good sense becomes a tyrant, but a ruler who hates dishonesty will rule for a long time.

17. A man guilty of murder will be on the run and will try to hide. Don't stop him and take him into your house.

18. Whoever is honest is on the right road, but he who is dishonest will stumble and fall.

19. A farmer who works his land will have plenty to eat, but he who doesn't will end up in poverty.

20. Honest people live a happy life, but those who try to get rich in a hurry will suffer.

21. It's wrong to be partial; some judges will do so when offered money.

22. Selfish people who are in a hurry to get rich don't realize that poverty is waiting for them around the corner.

23. He who helps others by kindly correcting their mistakes will gain more favor than he who flatters.

24. He who steals from his father or mother is no better than a robber.

25. A proud man causes no end of trouble, but he who is humble and trusts the Lord will succeed.

26. He who trusts only himself is a fool,

but he who trusts the Lord is wise.

27. He who helps the poor will not lack, but he who closes his eyes to the needs of others will have many troubles.

28. When the wicked rule, good people feel like hiding, but when the wicked fall, good people do better.

More Proverbs for King Hezekiah

29 The man who refuses to be corrected will one day find himself beyond help.

2. When the righteous rule, everyone is happy, but when wicked people rule, everyone groans.

3. A son who loves wisdom brings joy to his father, but a son who keeps company with bad women will soon lose all his money.

4. A good king helps his country, but an evil king brings it to ruin.

5. He who keeps flattering people builds a trap for himself.

6. A wicked man will be caught in his own sin, but a good man is free and is glad.

7. Good people seek justice for the poor, but the wicked couldn't care less.

8. Those who laugh at the law throw the country into turmoil, but those who obey the law keep things calm.

9. If a wise man takes a fool to court, the fool will laugh and make fun of him. And there will be no peace.

10. Wicked people hate those who are good and will kill them if they get in the way.

11. A fool quickly loses his temper and says whatever is on his mind, but a wise man controls himself and is careful about what he says.

12. If a ruler listens to lies or lies himself, soon those under him will do the same.

13. Poor people and those who take advantage of them have one thing in

common—the Lord gives life to both.

14. If a king is fair to everyone, he will rule for a long time.

15. Correction and discipline help make a child wise, but a child left without guidance will bring shame to its mother.

16. When bad people are in power, evil increases, but in time the righteous will see them fall.

17. Correct and discipline a son, and he'll be a delight to have around.

18. Where there is no vision or guidance from the Lord, people are without restraint, but those who keep the law are happy.

19. Some workers can't be corrected by words alone; though they hear what you're saying, they don't respond.

20. There is more hope for a fool than for a man who is hasty with his words.

21. If you give a servant everything he wants, soon he'll feel as if he owns everything you have.

22. A man with a quick temper causes nothing but trouble, and an angry man will commit many sins.

23. A man's pride will bring him low, but a humble man will be honored.

24. He who helps a thief is his own worst enemy. If He doesn't testify against the thief, he'll be the one charged with the crime.

25. Always being afraid is not good, but trusting the Lord is always safe.

26. Many people want to be on the good side of a ruler, but only the Lord is totally fair.

27. Good people don't like dishonesty, and evil people don't like those who are honest.

Other Collections of Wisdom

30 These are other proverbs collected by Agur and passed on to others.

2. Sometimes I feel as dumb as an animal because of the mistakes I've made.

3. I have not learned to be as wise as I should be, nor do I know God as I would like to.

4. Who has been in heaven and come down to tell us about God? Who is so strong that he can hold the wind in his hands? Who can set the boundaries of oceans and wrap them around the earth like a coat? Who decided how big this planet should be? What is His name and the name of His Son? You know.

5-6. Every word of God is sure. He's a shield to everyone who trusts Him. Don't add to what He has said or take away from it. If you do, He will have to correct you and show that you're a liar.

7-9. Lord, I ask only two things of You before I die. Please don't say, "No." Keep me from being dishonest, and don't make me either rich or poor. If I have too much, I won't realize my need of You. If I have too little, I might steal, and disgrace Your name.

10. Never criticize a worker in front of his boss. He will curse you for what you said.

11. Some people are so evil that they curse their own father and never thank their mother.

12-13. Some are always good in their own eyes. They don't see their own sins and mistakes but look down on others.

14. Some people's teeth are as sharp as a lion's; they take advantage of everyone they can, especially the poor and needy.

15-16. Being greedy is like having two daughters who keep saying, "Give me! Give me!" Four things are never satisfied—women who can't have children, the desert needing rain, a fire burning out of control, and the grave. They never say, "Stop! That's enough!"

17. He who makes fun of his father and doesn't obey his mother will get into trouble.

18-19. Four things amaze me: a soaring eagle, a snake slithering up a smooth rock, a huge sailing ship gliding across the ocean, and a man and woman falling in love.

20. A unfaithful wife sleeps with another man, then comes home and eats as if nothing had happened.

21-23. There are four things that people don't appreciate: a servant who acts like a king, a fool who eats like a glutton, a wicked woman who gets married, and a servant girl who tries to take charge of the house.

24-28. There are four things that are very small but very wise: ants that know to store up food for the winter; little rock rabbits that know where to find a secure place to make their home; locusts who have no king, yet advance in unity like an army; and the weak spider getting into kings' palaces.

29-31. There are four things that have a stately bearing: a lion when he walks, afraid of nothing; a rooster strutting in front of hens; a male goat facing a challenger; and a king parading his troops.

32. If you're foolish enough to brag about yourself, you'd better close your mouth. If you're foolish enough to plan something bad, you'd better stop and think.

33. As surely as cream produces butter and a blow to the nose brings blood, so anger will bring on trouble.

A Mother's Advice

31 This is what the king's mother told him: "Son, you are the answer to my prayers. Listen to me. Don't use the strength of your youth chasing women. This has ruined kings.

4-7. "Listen to me. Don't drink or develop a craving for alcohol. When kings drink, they forget the law and take away people's rights. Alcohol is

good only for cleansing wounds or relieving intense pain.

8-9. "Son, speak up for those who can't defend themselves and for those who need help. Speak up for your people and be fair to everyone. Protect the rights of the poor and needy."

A Good Wife

10-15. Who can point to a good wife? She's worth more than jewels. Her husband has confidence in her. He will never be poor. She will do him good all the days of her life. She shops for food, gets up early, and plans for the day. She looks after her family as well as her servants.

16-18. She also looks at property, buys it, and plants a vineyard. She puts all her energy into what she does. She knows the value of what she sells, and works late into the night to make a profit.

19-22. She makes her own clothes. She gives generously to the poor and

helps those in need. She provides for her family for winter by making sure that they all have warm clothes to wear. She also makes her own curtains and bedspreads. How tasteful and beautiful they are!

23. Her husband is respected because of her and is chosen to serve on the city council.

24-26. She makes clothes to sell and supplies the merchants with what they need. She's respected in her own right. She prepares for the future. She speaks gentle words of wisdom and teaches others to be kind.

27-29. She's not lazy, and does all she can for her family. Her children respect her and say so. Her husband praises her and says, "There are many good women, but you surpass them all."

30-31. Beauty disappears, but a woman who honors the Lord will be praised. She will be rewarded for what she has done. She will be praised by everyone.

Ecclesiastes

INTRODUCTION: *This book was written by Solomon near the end of his reign, around 930 B.C. It tells us that no one can be really happy without God. We learn that God is more important than anything else in life. He's more important than money, pleasure, or success. Those things alone can't make people happy. That's why Solomon tells us to love God and keep His commandments.*

Some Things Never Change

1 These are the words of Solomon, the son of David and king of Israel.

2-4. When you look at our earthly life and what we do here, you realize that nothing lasts forever. We work hard all our lives, but someday we have to die. It's the same for every generation. Meanwhile, the earth keeps spinning as if nothing is happening.

5-8. The sun rises and sets. The wind blows south, then north, and then in circles, as if it doesn't know where it's going. Rivers flow into the oceans, but the oceans never get full. The oceans give moisture to the clouds and the clouds give rain, which runs into the rivers. Then it starts all over again. Life is filled with work. And no matter how much we see or hear, we're never satisfied.

9-11. Things happen in life, and then they happen again. There's really nothing new. Someone says, "Look! That's never happened before!" But it has, before he saw it. People just don't remember. Things will happen in the future, but in time people won't remember them, either. Each generation has to learn the lessons of life all over again.

Knowledge and Happiness

12-13. As your teacher and king, I want to tell you about my life and what I did right here in Jerusalem. One day I decided to get as much out of life as possible. First I studied everything I could to find out what life was all about.

14-15. I saw all the jobs that people do, but ultimately they are useless and unimportant. Man cannot make this world perfect. He can't furnish what's needed to change things.

16-17. Then I said to myself, "I'm king of Israel and wiser than any king before me. I've learned a lot and gained a lot of insight. But I want to know what makes the difference between knowledge and ignorance, wisdom and foolishness."

18. Well, I found out that the more you know, the more grief you have. The more insight you have, the more sorrow you feel.

Pleasure and Happiness

2 After that I decided to enjoy myself. I wanted to be happy. But I soon found out that if all you want is to have fun, life will have no meaning.

2. I also found out that to do nothing but laugh and have fun turns you

into a fool. You can't make life one big party. I tried it, but it doesn't work.

3-7. Next I tried to do great things to see if that would make me happy. I built palaces and expanded my farms and orchards. I made parks and built huge dams. I brought men and women from everywhere to work for me. I owned more cattle than anyone in Jerusalem.

8-10. I collected silver and gold as taxes from my colonies. I had men and women singers, and special musical instruments. I was greater than anyone in Israel and felt proud of myself. I was happy. I did what I wanted and felt good. I always rewarded myself with pleasure for all the work I did.

11. Then one day I looked at all I had done and realized that the way I was living had no meaning. So all my endeavors to be happy by being super-busy, then rewarding myself with pleasure, didn't really satisfy. People had tried this before. I had discovered nothing new.

Wisdom and Happiness

12-14. So I decided to give my attention to gaining more wisdom. I also thought about what the next king would do that I had not already done. Obviously wisdom is better than foolishness. A wise man looks ahead to see where he's going, but a fool can't see beyond his nose.

15-17. As I thought about this I realized that a wise man and a fool both have to die. So what did I gain by being wise? People will forget about both of us anyway. I worked hard and did many things. But it's like chasing the wind.

18-19. The more I thought about this, the more I didn't like all the extra work I was doing. All it did was give me a lot of headaches. I thought it

would bring lasting happiness, but it didn't. The next king might tear down what I had built. But I wouldn't be around to learn what he thought I had done wrong. In one way, life and work seemed so useless.

God Is the Answer

20-21. As I kept thinking about this, I became discouraged over all the work I had done. A man sits down and makes plans, works skillfully and hard, but when he dies, it goes to those who never worked for it. This isn't right.

22-23. So what does a person get out of life? He works hard, goes through a lot of pain, and can't sleep well at night because he has so much on his mind. What's the use?

24-25. Finally I decided that the best thing in life is to enjoy your work, your family, and your meals with friends. These are the simple pleasures that God gave us. Without Him we wouldn't live to enjoy anything.

26. God is the source of wisdom, knowledge, and joy. He gives happiness to those who live to please Him, and takes it away from those who sin and don't care. Wicked people work hard too, but one day all their wealth will be given to those who love God. Whatever a man has, he can't hold on to it forever. So life without God is like chasing the wind.

Everything Has Its Time

3 There are times and seasons to do things on earth.

2. There was a certain day when you were born, and there will come a day when you will die. There is a time to plant, and a time to harvest what you have planted.

3. There is a time when we must help others get well, and a time when we must

let go and let them die. There are times to build, and times to tear things down.

4. There are times to laugh, and times to cry; times of joy, and times of sorrow.

5. There are times to pick up stones and use them, and times to get rid of stones. There are times to hug, and times not to do so.

6. There are times to look for things, and times to stop looking. There are times to collect things, and times to throw them away.

7. There are times to sew things together, and times to tear them apart. There are times to speak, and times to keep quiet.

8. There are times to love, and times not to love. There are times to make peace, and times to go to war.

God Knows What's Best

9-11. So what do we get out of all our work? Well, work is part of life. In the beginning God made everything beautiful. He made men and women to look like Him. He put eternity in their hearts, but man can't know everything. 12-13. There's nothing better in life than to do good, be happy in your work, and to enjoy a good meal. These are gifts from God.

14. Everything that God does lasts. Nothing can be added to it or taken away. Whatever God does is for our good, which makes us love Him even more.

15. Whatever happens to us has happened to people before. So God takes everything about our lives into consideration.

God Is Just

16. There's another thing I learned in life. Because of wickedness everything isn't always fair, and because of evil everything isn't just.

17. When I looked at this, I said to my-

self, "God will have to judge our actions and motives. He will take all the circumstances into consideration."

18-19. God needs to let us see that our hope is not in ourselves but in Him. Man without God has no more hope than an animal. We die just as they do.

20-21. We all turn to dust. What happens to the spark of life when we die? Does ours go up while the spark of life of an animal goes down, or does it just disappear?

22. There's nothing better in life than to enjoy your work and be happy. That's what God has in mind for us. We don't have the power to bring ourselves back from the dead to check on the next generation.

Injustice

4 I took a careful look at injustice and found that many people are being oppressed. They cry out for help, but no one pays attention. And they can't change things, because they don't have anyone to help them.

2-3. Sometimes it's more desirable to die than to live. It's sometimes better not to have been born than to be oppressed and mistreated.

Work

4. Another thing I noticed in life is that people work to get ahead because they usually want to live better than their neighbors. This is meaningless. It's like chasing the wind.

5. A fool sits around with folded hands, willing to starve rather than work.

6. It's better to have less and be content than to always be struggling for more. That too is like chasing the wind.

7-8. I saw something else in life hard to understand. I saw an old man living alone. He had no brothers or sisters, and no sons or daughters. He was

always working but never seemed happy. He never said to himself, "Why am I working so hard? Why don't I slow down and enjoy life?" It's sad and seems so senseless.

Two Are Better Than One

9-10. Two people are better off than one, because they can work together and also encourage each other. If one falls, the other can help him up. But I feel sorry for the man who is alone, because when he falls, he has no one to help him.

11. When two people sleep together, they can keep each other warm, which is better than if each one sleeps alone and is cold.

12. Two people can resist an attack better than one. A rope made from three strands is much stronger than rope made from one strand.

Popularity

13-14. A poor young man who is wise is better off than an old foolish king. A teachable young man could get ahead and become king, even if he was born in poverty.

15-16. As I carefully considered this, I realized that while such a young man could become king, another young man could come along and replace him. At first people follow a new king, but another generation then comes that could reject him. Trying to be popular is like chasing the wind. It's all so useless.

Making Promises

5 Be humble and teachable when you go to church. It's better to listen than to give an offering, like a fool who doesn't care what's right or wrong.

2. Think before you speak, and don't make a promise to God that you can't

keep. God is in heaven and rules the whole universe. So be humble and listen to what He says.

3. When you work too hard and worry too much, you'll have bad dreams. A fool doesn't know when to be quiet.

4-5. When you promise to do something for God or to give Him something, don't keep putting it off, or you'll forget. God isn't happy with people who make promises without thinking. It's better not to make a promise than to make one and not keep it.

6. Don't let your feelings run away with you and make promises you can't keep. Don't tell God you made a mistake, then turn around and do it again. Don't play games like that with God. It's not respectful, and He can't bless you when you do it.

7. Talking too much and dreaming too much are useless. Respect God, and be honest with Him.

Money

8-9. If you see the poor being oppressed by some local official, don't be surprised. He will have to give account to someone above him, and the king is above them all. But above the king is God.

10-11. Anyone in love with money never has enough. No matter how much he has, he's never satisfied. All the work that goes into making more and more money doesn't make sense. The only advantage is being able to let others see what you have.

12. A working man sleeps well at night whether he has much or little. A rich man may have all he needs and more, but worries so much about it that he can't sleep.

13. I've noticed something in life. People work so hard to make money that they suffer physically and spiritually.

14. When bad things happen and all the money is gone, the parents have nothing left to give their children.

15. A baby comes into this world with nothing, and when a man dies he leaves this world with nothing.

16-17. A man works hard all his life to get ahead, but it also brings worry, stress, and sickness. After he dies, what good does his money do him?

18-19. It's good for a man to enjoy his work during the life that God has given him. It is a gift from God.

20. A man should not keep thinking about the past, or worry about how long he'll live. He should keep busy and enjoy God's blessings one day at a time.

Being Rich

6 There's another thing I've noticed in life. God lets a man buy property, be honored, and enjoy what he has. But God won't let him live on and on. And when he dies, others will get what he has. This seems so useless.

3. If a man is rich, has 100 children, and lives a long time, but doesn't enjoy life, what's the use? Rich and poor alike will die.

4-6. Being born is coming out of darkness, and dying is going back into it. In one sense, when a baby dies at birth it's better off because it doesn't have to work. If a man worked for 1,000 years and then died, he would still have to leave what he had to others. Both he and the baby that dies at birth sleep in the grave.

7. Much of man's work goes into feeding himself. He can't stop eating or he'll die.

8-9. A wise man has an advantage over a fool. But what advantage does a poor man have? Hopefully, he's learned to appreciate what he has. That's better than always wanting

more, because nothing lasts anyway.

10-11. Everything important has already been decided. There's nothing man can do about it, because God is more powerful than he is. The more you argue about it, the more useless the argument becomes.

12. Who knows what's really best for a man during his life? His life is so short—it's like a shadow that comes and goes. In one way, you can't plan for the future. You don't know what's going to happen on earth after you die.

Choose to Be Wise

7 A good reputation is better than perfume. The end of life with a good reputation is better than the beginning of life without it.

2. Everyone needs to think about the importance of life and the certainty of death. It's better to do that than to think about fun all the time.

3-4. Sorrow teaches us things that laughter alone cannot. A person who tries to laugh his way through life is a fool. But a wise man considers the end of life.

5-6. It's better to have a wise man rebuke you than to have a fool tell you how great you are. When a fool laughs, it's like the crackling of a fire—it doesn't mean a thing.

7. When a wise man cheats, he's acting like a fool. When he takes a bribe, it ruins his reputation.

8. The end of something is better than its beginning. Patience is better than pride.

9. Don't let your frustration turn into anger; holding a grudge is foolish.

10. Don't keep thinking about the good old days; only fools live in the past.

11-12. Wisdom is like an inheritance—it's good only to those who receive it. Wisdom is like a shelter in a storm—it gives more protection than

money. Knowledge is good, but wisdom preserves life.

13-14. Stop in your busy schedules and think about God. When things go right, thank Him. When things go wrong, go to Him for help. He's the only one who knows what tomorrow will bring.

15. I've noticed two things in life that are hard to understand: when a good man dies young and an evil one lives a long time.

16-18. Don't think that you're so righteous or act like a know-it-all. Don't be a fool and live a life of sin. Don't work so hard that you die before you should. Don't go to an extreme in anything. Make God the center of your life, and you'll be satisfied.

19. Wisdom gives strength. One wise man can do more than ten city officials.

20. No one does everything right without ever making some mistakes.

21-22. Don't try to know what everyone says about everything. You might hear your servants saying bad things about you. Just remember that you too have said things that you shouldn't have about people.

23. I examined everything I'm saying, and decided that above anything else, I would choose to be wise. But wisdom was beyond my reach.

24. Whatever wisdom is, it's hard to define. How do you get it?

25. I decided to study hard to learn as much as I could; maybe then I would be wise. What I found out was how dumb and foolish it is to be wicked.

26. The other thing I found out was that to listen to a wicked woman is like being caught in a trap. The only way to escape is to put God first.

27. The one thing that I learned from all my study is that to love God is to find meaning in life.

28. I looked for other answers but found none. And I found few men or

women whom I could really trust.

29. The one thing I have learned is that God made people to be good and to live an honest life. But people have misused their freedom and have done what they wanted to do.

Be Good Citizens

8 Who is wise? Who understands what everything means? It's wisdom that makes a man happy and puts a smile on his face.

2. Listen to me, because that's what you promised God you would do when you asked for a king.

3-5. Don't act in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Listen to him, and don't support what's wrong. Otherwise the king will punish you. He has authority over the whole country. As long as you keep his laws and are a good citizen, you'll be fine. A wise man knows this.

6-7. There's a right time and a wrong time to do things, even though we don't always know when that is. No one really knows what's going to happen tomorrow.

8. No one has the power to keep himself from dying. In that sense, there are no winners in life. The grave will not let go of those it has; neither will wickedness let go of those who choose to live in sin.

9. The other thing I discovered in life is that when certain men rule, innocent people end up getting hurt.

Man's Destiny

10. I have seen wicked men being buried, and people talk about them as if they were heroes. They became famous because of their crimes. This makes no sense.

11. Whenever the sentence of a crime is not quickly carried out, people don't feel threatened by the law when they do wrong.

12-13. Even though a wicked man commits 100 crimes and gets away with it, things are still better for a good man who respects God and does right. Usually a criminal gets caught or dies young. His life is gone as quickly as a shadow.

14. There's something else that happens in life. Good things happen to bad people and bad things to good people. The good and the bad don't always get what they deserve. This also doesn't make sense.

15. A man should be happy and enjoy his family and friends. This will cheer him up and keep him going all the days of his life.

16-17. When I wanted to become wise, I found that a man can study day and night and still not become wise. No matter how hard he tries, he'll never fully understand why things happen the way they do, or why God lets certain things happen and not others. Even if a wise man says he understands, he doesn't understand everything.

More About Man's Destiny

9 So I concluded that no matter how much we know, our future is in the hands of God. We don't even know whether good things or bad things will happen next.

2. The end of life is the same for everyone, whether he's been good or bad, religious or not, or whether he's worked for God or not. When it comes to dying, it happens to everyone.

3. The bad thing about living in this world is that everyone has to die, good and evil people alike.

4. But there's always hope for the living. To be alive is better than to be dead. A live dog is better than a dead lion.

5-6. The living know that someday

they will die, but the dead know nothing. What they have done will soon be forgotten. Their hope, love, hatred, and jealousy are all buried with them. Never again will they have a say in anything that's done here.

7-8. So enjoy your family and friends and be happy. God planned it that way. Dress in clean clothes, look nice, and comb your hair.

9. If you're married, be happy and enjoy life with the woman you love. Otherwise life is just a round of activities that never end.

10. Whatever you find to do, do your best and enjoy it. Once you're dead, you can't work, think, learn, or share your wisdom and knowledge with others.

11. There's something else I noticed about life. Fast runners don't always win the race. The bravest don't always win the battle. Wise men don't always make the right decisions. Capable people don't always get to the top. And those who are intelligent don't always make the most money. Timing and opportunities play a big part in it all.

12. No one can predict the hard times that lie ahead or when he will die. Birds may hop along the ground looking for food and suddenly hop into a trap without knowing it. Or fish may swim along and suddenly get caught in a net.

Words of Wisdom

13-14. One thing impressed me about the power of wisdom. There was a little city with not many people to defend it. A powerful king came against it, surrounded it, and was ready to break down its walls.

15-16. A poor man who was wise lived in the city and saved it with his wisdom. But after he died, the people forgot all about him. When I saw this, I decided that wisdom is better than

power. But no one thinks that a poor man can be wise. So they don't pay attention to him.

17-18. It's better to listen to the quiet words of a poor wise man than to the shouting of a foolish king. Wisdom does more good than weapons of war. But one sinner can undo a lot that is good.

More Words of Wisdom

10 A few dead flies in a bottle of perfume can make the whole thing smell bad. A few dumb acts can spoil a good reputation. Just as it's natural for a wise man to do good things, it's natural for a fool to do what's wrong. A fool shows how dumb he is by what he does.

4. If your boss becomes angry with you over a mistake that you made, don't get upset and quit. Listen quietly to what he has to say, then go back and do things right. Soon your mistake will be forgotten.

5-7. I noticed that leaders and rulers also make mistakes. They put dumb people in charge of things, while those who know how to do things right are given lesser positions. I've seen servants favored and given horses to ride, while princes had their positions taken away and were made to walk.

8-9. Whoever digs a pit for someone else may fall into it himself. He who goes around at night breaking down people's stone fences may be bitten by a snake. Whoever digs rocks out of a mountain takes a risk of being hurt. Whoever cuts wood takes a chance of hurting himself.

10. If an ax is blunt and you don't sharpen it, it will take more strength to do the same job. So think things through before you do them.

11. If a snake bites you before it's charmed, what good does it do to charm it?

12-15. A wise man speaks graciously and is honored, but a fool destroys himself by the dumb things he says. A fool talks on and on and doesn't know when to stop. No one knows the future, but a fool doesn't even look ahead. He talks so much that he gets lost on his way to town.

16-17. A country is in trouble when its king is young and inexperienced. He attends banquets until late at night, and the next day he can't make right decisions. Happy is the country whose king is mature and whose officials eat for health and strength, not just to feast and get drunk.

18. When a man is too lazy to fix his roof, it continues to leak. Soon the wood will rot, and the whole roof will have to be replaced.

19. Eating and drinking make people happy, but so does money, because you can buy what you want.

20. Don't criticize a king or a rich man out loud, even when you think you're all alone, because someone might overhear it and then take off like a bird to tell what you said.

Be Grateful

11 Do what you can to help those in need; God will bless you for it.

2. Invest your money in several places, because you don't know what will fail and what will succeed.

3. There are certain things we do know. If clouds are dark and full of water, it will rain. Once a tree falls it will stay where it fell, whether to the north or to the south.

4. Whoever waits for perfect weather before doing anything will never plant his seeds. He who worries that every cloud will bring rain will never reap the harvest.

5. Just as you don't know everything

about the wind or about a baby before it's born, so you can't know everything about what God does and why.

6. Get going early in the morning. Sow your seeds; then keep going until they are all planted. You don't know which ones will do well and which ones won't.

7-8. It feels good to be alive and enjoy the sunshine of a new day. Be grateful for every year that God gives you, because no matter how long you live, you will die. In the grave there's nothing but darkness and silence.

9. Enjoy life while you're young. Let your heart overflow with joy. But remember that whatever you do, good or bad, has consequences. One day you will have to give an account to God for everything that you have done.

10. Don't do things that will hurt your body, because the joys of being young and strong won't last forever. Getting older comes to everyone.

Give God the Best

12 Remember your Creator while you're young. Give Him the best of your life, not just what's left over. Time passes quickly, and one day you'll be old. Then you'll say to yourself, "I don't enjoy life as I used to."

2. When those days come, you won't be able to see things as you used to. The stars won't be as clear, and things won't look as bright.

3-4. Your legs won't be as strong and quick. They may shake or give way. You might lose some of your teeth, and it will be harder to chew. Your ears won't work as well. You'll barely hear the singing of the birds or the voices in the street. Those who make

music will be asked to keep it low.

5. You'll have to be careful where you walk, so that you won't fall. Your hair will be white, and you'll have to rest more often. Your desires will not be the same. You'll be on your way to your last resting place. People will mourn for you as they have for others, but there'll be no turning back.

6-7. The silver chain that binds you to your loved ones will break. The golden lamp of life will go out. The rope on the pulley of life's well will snap. The pitcher full of the water of life will drop. Your body will return to dust, and the spark of life will go back to God, who gave it.

8. Everything in life is temporary. Nothing lasts forever.

The Only Thing That Matters

9-10. When I thought about all this, I decided that nothing is more important than for me to pass on to others what I know. So I have written many proverbs to help people. I looked for the right words and said what was honest and true.

11. The words from wise men are like prods to keep animals from straying. The words of teachers are like firmly driven nails to hold things down. All wise teachings come from the great Shepherd of God's people.

12. So be careful, my son, about teachings that are not right. There is no end to new books, and too much studying is not good for the body.

13-14. After all is said and done, this is what really matters: Love God and keep His commandments. This is all He expects. One day He will look at everything we have done in this life, to see if it was good or evil.

Song of Solomon

INTRODUCTION: *Solomon wrote this book too. It's a poem about a man and woman in love who were getting married. It helps us better understand the importance of love and marriage. This book also gives us a picture of how much Jesus loves His church, which the Bible calls His bride.*

The Bridegroom and His Bride

1 This was written by Solomon about a bridegroom and his bride.

Bride

2-3. I dream of the day when the man I love will come and kiss me. His name is as sweet as perfume. No one can help loving him.

4. Come and be my husband. You are the king of Jerusalem. Take me to your palace. There we will be happy together. You are so strong and kind; no wonder people love you.

5-6. Young women of Jerusalem, I am dark but lovely. I've been working out in the sun. My brothers made me take care of the vineyards, so I had no time for myself.

7. Tell me, my husband-to-be, where will you take your sheep to feed? Where will they rest in the shade? Tell me so that I don't have to go looking for you among the shepherds.

Bridegroom

8. My dear bride, don't you know where I'll be? Follow the tracks of my sheep, and you'll also see a herd of goats near a tent. That's where I'll be.

9-10. You are so beautiful. Your hair is lovely as its braids fall around your neck like a string of pearls.

Bride and Friends

11. Dear bride, we are your friends. We will make ornaments of gold for your wedding.

12-14. Thank you, my friends. When the king and I sat and talked, my perfume filled the air. He rested his head on my shoulder, and I stroked his hair. He had the fragrance of the wild flowers of the field.

Bridegroom and Bride

15. My dearest bride, how beautiful you are! Your eyes are full of love for me.

16-17. My dear bridegroom, how handsome you are! Your strong presence is a joy. Let's not just sit here. Let's lie down in the grass and talk. The tall cedars of Lebanon will be a roof over our heads.

Bride and Bridegroom

2 I am only a country girl, like a flower from the field of Sharon, like a lily in the valley.

2. My dear, when I compare you to other women, you are more beautiful than all of them. You are more than just a lily. You're like a rose in full bloom.

3. And when I compare you to other men, you are like an apple tree full of

blossoms. Your fruit is sweet, and I love to sit in the shade of your presence.

Bride and Friends

4. My friends, the king invited me to a banquet at the palace. He told everyone that he loves me and that I am his bride.

Bride and Bridegroom

5. My dear husband-to-be, I love you so much that I feel weak. Let me eat some raisins and apples to give me strength.

Bride and Friends

6-7. My friends, he loves me very much. He put his left arm under my head and with his right arm he held me close. But promise that you will not urge me to sleep with him until we're married.

8-9. Listen! I hear my beloved's voice. Look! There he comes again! He's running down that mountain and bounding over the hills, running like a deer. Look! He's already standing outside, looking through the windows, looking for me.

Bridegroom

10-13. Come, my bride, my beautiful one. Come with me. The winter is over, and spring is here. The flowers are in bloom, and the cooing of doves is heard. The figs are beginning to ripen, and fragrance fills the air. Come with me.

14-15. You are like a dove that hides itself from me. Let me hear your voice. It is sweet to my ears. Let me see your face. You are beautiful. Come, go to the mountains with me. Let's chase the baby foxes that keep knocking the blossoms off the vines.

Bride

16-17. My king loves me. I am his. He

feeds his flocks among the lilies of the field. I will dream of him until the morning comes. Come back later, my dear. Come like a deer bounding over the hills.

A Bad Dream

3 My dear friends, the other night I had a bad dream. I couldn't find the one I love. In my dream I went to Jerusalem and looked everywhere, but couldn't find him. The night watchman stopped me. I told him whom I was looking for, but he couldn't help me.

4-5. I turned to walk away, and suddenly I saw him, the one I love. I ran and held on to him and wouldn't let him go. I brought him to my parents' house, to the place where I was born. Promise that you will not urge me to sleep with him before he's mine.

The Bridegroom Comes

6-8. Look! A cloud of dust! The bridegroom is coming in his royal carriage. He's surrounded by sixty of Israel's finest troops, all wearing swords, ready to fight for him.

9-10. The king's carriage is covered with silver and gold. Its cushions were made by the finest craftsmen in Jerusalem.

11. Come, my friends, let's go out to meet the king! He's wearing the crown his mother placed on his head for our wedding day. This is the day that will bring joy to the king. It's the day he's been waiting for.

Bridegroom

4 How beautiful you are, my darling! Your eyes are as gentle as a dove. Your hair is lovely. Your teeth are like the whitest pearls surrounded by a red ribbon. Your cheeks are as red as a pomegranate.

4-7. I will put pearls and jewels around your neck. I will decorate it as the tower of David is decorated with the golden shields of a thousand warriors. Your body is shapely and beautiful. I'm willing to wait for you until morning, if you need more time. How perfectly beautiful you are!

8-10. But come with me now, if you can. Come, let's first take a ride in the mountains. Let's go where the young lions and leopards play. The sparkle in your eye is like the sparkle of a diamond. You have stolen my heart. Your love for me makes me happy. It's better than the most costly banquet or the most expensive perfume.

11-15. Your mouth is as full of sweetness as a honeycomb is full of honey. Your clothes have the fresh smell of the mountains. You are a virgin, like a beautiful garden kept just for me. You are like a garden full of the fragrance of blossoms and fresh flowers. Your presence is like a refreshing stream.

Bride

16. I am your bride. I am all yours. Come, winds, blow on my garden and carry the fragrance of my blossoms everywhere. Let the king make my garden his own.

Bridegroom

5 My dear bride, I enjoy the fragrance of your presence. I have come to enjoy the sweetness of your smile. God wants us to celebrate our marriage with our friends and guests and rejoice in our love.

Bride

2-3. My friends, sometime ago while I was sitting in my garden, I fell asleep. In my dream the king was at the door, saying, "Sweetheart, let me come in. My head is covered with the damp-

ness of the night." I said to him, "I'm ready for bed. Why should I get dressed and let you in?"

4-6. He put his hand on the doorknob, and my heart began to pound. It jumped for joy because of him. So I put on my robe and opened the door, but he was gone. My heart sank. In my dream I ran out into the night calling for him, but there was no answer.

7-8. The night watchmen patrolling the streets saw me. I went to my friends and asked them to help me find him. If they did, they were to tell him that I love him with all my heart.

9. They said, "Dear bride, why do you love him so? What makes him so special to you?"

10-13. He's handsome and strong. He's one in ten thousand. His face is tanned. His hair is wavy and black. His eyes are as tender and innocent as a dove. His cheeks and beard are like a well-trimmed garden. His lips are like flower petals giving off perfume.

14-16. His arms are like gold and his legs like pillars of marble. His appearance is majestic. His nature is gentle and kind. He's my friend, my husband-to-be. That's what makes him so very special to me.

Bride

6 My friends said, "Most beautiful bride, Where is he? Where has he gone? We will help you look for him. Maybe he's gone back home to put his flocks out to pasture."

3. Then my dream ended, and I found myself sitting in my garden. Yes, he is mine, and I am his.

Bridegroom

4. My darling, my wife-to-be, there you are! I've been looking for you. You are so very beautiful. You are more important to me than Jerusalem. You are

more regal than an army with banners. **5-7.** Don't look at me with such love. Your eyes hold me captive. Your hair shimmers in the sun. Your smile is captivating. Your cheeks have the gentle color of a ripened pomegranate.

Bride

8. Your majesty, my king. There are lots of beautiful women in Jerusalem. There are many young queens and lovely virgins. Why did you choose me?

Bridegroom

9-10. My friends, she is the perfect one for me. My dove, the one I love. She's her mother's only daughter. Her friends say that she was blessed by God. Even the queens and beautiful young women know that. Her presence is as fresh as the dawn, as fair as the moon, as clear as the sun, and as regal as an army with banners.

11-12. My dear bride, I had to go to the valley to check on the fruit trees and vineyards. Before I knew it, my desire for you was as strong as chariots going into battle. I had to come.

Friends and Bride

13. Come back, come back, dear bride. Let us look at you one more time before you go. Bride: Why do all of you keep looking at me as though you were watching me dance for the king's army? I must go with the one I love.

Bridegroom

7 My dear bride, how beautiful you are! Your body is the work of a skilled craftsman. You are so graceful. Your eyes sparkle, and your face is lovely to behold.

5-8. You walk with your head held high. Your hair is like the finest silk

draped over your shoulders. How beautiful you look! How pure is your love for me! You are as graceful as a palm tree. Your breath has the aroma of ripened apples, and your kiss is like the taste of fresh grapes.

Bride

9-13. My dear husband-to-be, let my love flow out to you. I belong to you, and I know that you love me. Come, let's take a ride through the country before we go to Jerusalem. We can check on the fruit trees and vineyards, as you were doing. I want you to know how much I love you. Spring is in the air, and the fragrance of flowers is everywhere.

Bride

8 My dear, if you were my brother, then I could kiss you and no one would mind. I would bring you to my parents' house, and we could feel at ease. I would serve you the very best we have.

3-4. The one who loves me is now holding me. His left arm is under my head, and his right arm is holding me close. My dear friends, promise that you will not interrupt a bride and her groom.

Family, Bride, and Groom

5. Look who's coming from the orchard, arm in arm with the one she loves! Groom: I had to wake her up. She had fallen asleep under an apple tree while I was checking the vineyards.

6-7. Dear husband-to-be, keep your love only for me. Hold no one else in your arms. True love is stronger than death. Love is like a flame given us by the Lord. Water can't put it out. Floods can't drown it. All the money in the whole world can't buy it, because it's not for sale.

8-9. Dear sister, it was not that long ago that you were small. Soon you became a young woman, and we protected you. You were as precious to us as a wall of gold.

10. My dear brothers, now I'm grown and belong to my husband. I'm as precious to him as a wall of gold with silver towers. I'm happy and content. My heart is at rest.

11-12. Solomon has a most beautiful vineyard. He rents it out for 1,000 pieces of silver. Only a fifth

part of it goes to those who look after the fruit. I am like a vineyard. I decided to give myself to him because I love him.

13. My dear bride, let me hear your voice. My friends are waiting to hear you speak. They want to hear your lovely voice.

14. My love, my king, hold me close. You are the one who came running down the mountain and bounding over the hills like a powerful deer to be with me.

Isaiah

INTRODUCTION: *This book was written by the prophet Isaiah. His ministry covers sixty years, from 745 to 685 B.C. He warned the people of Judah that God would have to punish them if they continued doing wicked things, such as worshiping idols and breaking the Sabbath. But he also promised that God would comfort His people after disciplining them, and that He would make their country strong again. From Isaiah we learn that God is holy, that He is a judge, but also our hope and salvation. Isaiah has many wonderful prophecies about Jesus—who He is, what He will do, how He would die on the cross for our sins. Isaiah also prophesied that one day God will create a new heavens and a new earth, where sin will be no more.*

1 This book is about the visions and messages of Isaiah, which he shared over many years with four kings of Judah.

The Sins of Judah

2-3. This is what the Lord said: "All heaven and earth should listen. My children have turned against Me. A donkey knows its owner and appreciates his care. But My people don't know Me. No matter what I do for them, they don't understand."

4-8. "Israel, what a sinful nation you are, loaded down with guilt. Your heads and hearts are sick. Your body is covered with sores. Foreign armies have burned your cities. Strangers have eaten your crops. Now Jerusalem is being attacked. It's as helpless as an empty hut in an open field."

9-10. "If the Lord had not helped us, we would have been destroyed, as were the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. You must pay attention to what I'm telling you, Jerusalem. Your rulers and people are wicked."

11-12. "The Lord says, 'I don't need your sacrifices. They don't mean anything to Me anymore. You think that the more you bring, the more I like it. You're wrong. That's not what My Temple is for.'"

13-14. "'Stop bringing these sacrifices until you decide to change. By living in sin, you've made the Sabbath and the other religious days meaningless. I can't keep quiet about this any longer. I hate the wickedness that you're caught up in. Your form of worship does not make Me happy.'"

15-17. "'When you raise your hands in prayer, I cover My face and refuse to listen. Change your ways and clean up your lives. Stop doing evil and learn to do right. Help those in need, especially the orphans and widows.'"

18-20. "'Come, let's think about this together. Though you are stained red with sin, I can make you as white as snow. Though you are stained with blood, I can make you as white as wool. If you listen and do what I say, I will bless you, and your country will be full of good things again. But if you continue to do evil, your land will come to ruin. I, the Lord, have spoken.'"

Disloyalty

21-23. Look at Jerusalem. She was such a faithful city, full of justice and righteousness. Now she's full of violence, crime, and murder. Once she was as shiny as polished silver, as tasty as fresh grapes. But now she's

polluted. Her leaders love money more than people. They don't care about the orphans and widows.

24-26. God says, "You have turned against Me as if I were your enemy. I have no choice but to discipline you. I will make Jerusalem again like polished silver and tasty grapes. I will help her leaders do right, and once again she will be a faithful city to Me, called the City of Righteousness."

27-31. The Lord is good. He will do what is right. He will restore the city and redeem all those who come to Him. But those who rebel will perish. They will be ashamed of what they have done. They will be like dying trees and gardens without water. They will burn like dry wood, and no one will be able to stop the fire.

The Lord's Plan

2 This is the vision the Lord gave to me about the future of Jerusalem: The mountain on which the Temple now stands will become the most important mountain in the world. All nations will come there to worship God.

3. People everywhere will say, "Come, let's go to Jerusalem. Let us go and worship the God of Israel. He will teach us what we need to know." The law of God and His word will go out from Jerusalem to the whole world.

4. The Lord will be king and settle all disputes. People will turn their weapons into plows, and there will be no more war. But if the people of Jerusalem fail Him, God's plan will not change. He will create a new world where those who love Him will live forever.

Trust God

5-8. So come, let's walk in the way of the Lord. The Lord has drawn back

from us because the land is full of idols and witchcraft. Our country is rich, but people are not satisfied. They want more money and more horses and chariots. People are becoming slaves to what they're making. **9-16.** But the proud will be humbled; the powerful will be brought low. They will run to the mountains to hide from the glory of the Lord when He appears. He will destroy the forests, level the mountains, and flatten the hills. He will destroy tall buildings and sink huge ships. No one will be able to stand against Him.

17-19. Men will be humbled, and the Lord will be exalted. All that they have made will be destroyed. They will hide from the Lord in caves or holes in the ground when He comes to shake the earth.

20-22. They will throw away their money and run to the mountains to escape from His glory. So stop putting confidence in what men can do. Their power is as frail as the breath in their nostrils.

Jerusalem Will Be Punished

3 The Lord is ready to take away from Jerusalem everything that the people depend on. He will cut off their food supplies, take away their stars, heroes, troops, generals, judges, false prophets, fortunetellers, wizards, wise men, counselors, and idol makers.

4-5. The Lord will let inexperienced young men be elected to office. They will change all rules and regulations. Everyone will do what they want. Neighbor will turn against neighbor. Young people will rebel against authority, turn against their parents, and have no respect for older people.

6-8. Men will take anyone who looks good to make him their leader. He will

say, "I don't know how to solve your problems. I can't feed and clothe you. I don't want to be your leader." This will happen because God's chosen people have turned against Him and rejected His counsel.

9. Our people sin openly, as did the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. They don't care who sees what they do. They have brought all these troubles on themselves.

10-12. Those who do right will be rewarded. Those who do evil will receive their reward too. What they have done to others will be done to them. Gangs roam the streets and control the neighborhood. Women who display their bodies control politics. You are being led away from the Lord and don't even know it.

The Lord Takes Action

13-15. The Lord is ready to take the people to court and carry out His justice. He's ready to take action against the leaders. He says to them, "You have ruined Israel. You have taken advantage of the poor and been mean to them. How can you do this?"

16. The Lord also brings His case against the women of Jerusalem. They're selfish and proud and walk with their noses in the air. They wink with their eyes and wiggle their bodies; they wear so many jewels that it makes tinkling sounds when they walk.

17-23. The Lord will step in and take action. He will let sores cover their heads, and they will lose their hair. He will take away their earrings, bracelets, necklaces, decorated hats, and perfume. He will take away their magic charms, rings, nose jewels, fine clothes, and money. He will take away their mirrors, their tempting garments, and their beautiful veils.

24. In place of perfume there will be

an odor of open sores. In place of fine clothes, rags. In place of well-set hair, baldness. In place of beauty, shame.

25-26. Your young men will be killed in battle. The country will weep and mourn. Jerusalem will be like a homeless woman with no one to care for her.

The Future

4 When the days of trouble come, women will take any man that's left and say to him, "Come, we'll support you. We'll buy the food and clothes, but come and live with us so that we can be a family."

2-3. But the day will come when things will change again, and the Lord will make things right. The land will become beautiful. The people will be glad, and the country will prosper. In that day everyone in Jerusalem will be called holy and will love the Lord.

4-6. He will do what is right for Jerusalem. He will take away the sins of the people and purify the land. He will bless them as He did in days of old. He will be a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. His glory will be our defense. He will be a shade from the heat and a shelter in the time of storm.

God's Vineyard

5 Let me write a song about my Friend and His vineyard. "My Friend has a vineyard on a hill. He dug the soil, cleared the land of stones, and planted the best of vines. He built a stone fence, set up a watchtower, and put in a winepress. Then He looked forward to a harvest of good grapes. But all the grapes were sour.

3-4. "He says, 'People of Jerusalem, tell Me, what more could I have done to My vineyard that I have not done? Yet when I looked for good grapes, all I got were sour ones.

5-6. "Let Me tell you what I will do. I will break down the stone wall and let wild animals in to eat the grapes and break the vines. I will not loosen the soil or fertilize it. I will not pull up the weeds or thorns. And I will not water it."

7. "The vineyard of God is His people. The Lord expected His people to be good. He expected them to be merciful and just, but has seen only wickedness and bloodshed. He looked for them to do right, but instead has heard the cry of their victims."

Isaiah's Message

8-10. Listen! If you keep on buying more and more property and building bigger and bigger houses, you'll soon be left alone. The Lord says, "Your big houses will be empty, your vineyards and fields will be destroyed, and what is left will produce very little."

11-13. Woe to those who love their music and wine, who love to go to parties to get drunk. They don't remember what the Lord has done for them, nor do they want to be told. The Lord will remove His protection, and the country will be invaded. Many will be taken into exile. Leaders will die of hunger, and the people of thirst.

14-17. The grave will swallow up leaders and people alike. Jerusalem will be brought down and her people humbled. The Lord will be exalted in the eyes of the nations for punishing evil and carrying out justice. When it's over, sheep will feed on the property once owned by the rich, and foreigners will live in their houses.

18-19. Woe to those who give in to sin, who are tied to evil with ropes. Woe to those who say, "Let God hurry and carry out His plans so that we can see something happening and know that His word is true."

20-23. Woe to those who call evil

good and good evil. Woe to those who say that error is truth, darkness is light, and bitter is sweet. Woe to the self-righteous. Woe to those who are honored as champion drinkers. Woe to those who take money to let the guilty go free and deny justice to the innocent.

24-25. As surely as fire burns up straw, so shall be the end of the wicked. They have turned against God's commandments and rejected His word. The Lord will punish Jerusalem. He will shake the mountains. Bodies will be left in the streets like rubbish. But the punishment will not end.

26-28. He will let nations come against Jerusalem. Their strong troops will attack quickly. Not one of them will get tired. They will occupy your city, take off their shoes, and make themselves at home. Their arrows are sharp and their bows strong. Their horses are fast, and their chariot wheels spin like a whirlwind.

29-30. Their troops roar like lions before they attack. They growl like young lions as they carry off their captives. No one will rescue our people. Armies will sweep over the land like waves of the sea. A cloud of sorrow like darkness will hover over the land.

Isaiah's Call

6 The Lord called me to be a prophet the same year that our king died. One day as I was worshipping in the Temple I had a vision and saw God sitting on His throne. His presence filled the whole Temple.

2-4. Angels were all around Him. Each one had six wings. Two wings covered their faces, two their feet, and the other two were stretched out to fly. They were singing, "Holy, holy, holy! Holy is the Lord our God!" When they

sang, the huge pillars and doors of the Temple shook. The Temple began to fill with the smoke of incense.

5. I cried out, "I'm gone! There is no hope for me! I'm a sinner! What can I do? I live among people who sin. I'm doomed! I have seen the Lord our King, the God of Israel!"

6-7. Then one of the angels went and took a hot coal from the altar of incense in the heavenly Temple and flew down to me. He touched my lips with it and said, "This coal represents God's love and grace. Your sins are forgiven, and your guilt is gone."

8. Then I heard the Lord ask, "Whom shall I send? Who will be My messenger?" With a heart full of gratitude I answered, "Here I am; send me."

9-10. God said, "Go and give My people this message: No matter how much you listen, you don't understand. Your sins are making you deaf and blind. You don't even know what's right and wrong anymore. You don't want to hear and see, because you don't want to change."

11-12. Then I asked, "Lord, how long will things like this go on?" He answered, "Things won't change until their cities are destroyed and their vineyards are gone; until they're taken as captives to a foreign land."

13. "If the few people left in the country try to build, their enemies will burn it down. Yet as the stump of an oak tree brings forth new shoots, so will the Messiah come and give new strength to My people."

Isaiah and the King

7 After Ahaz became king, war broke out between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. When the people heard that Syria had joined with Israel to attack Jerusalem, their hearts melted, and they shook with fear.

3-4. Then the Lord said to me, "Take your son Shearjashub with you and go to see the king. He'll be by the pool that supplies the city with water. Tell the king not to worry. The foreign armies are no more dangerous than smoke from a campfire about to go out."

5-6. "They say, 'Let's attack Jerusalem. The people will give up; then we'll topple the king and put in his place a king who will be more like us.'"

7-9. "But I have decided that this will not happen. Damascus will be destroyed, and the king of Syria, who planned to attack Judah, will die. Then Assyria will attack Israel and take the city of Samaria. Israel's king, who also planned to attack Judah, will die too. So tell King Ahaz to hold on to his faith in Me. I'll protect Jerusalem."

Another Message

10-12. The Lord had another message for the king. He said, "Ask Me for a sign to confirm what I said, whether it's a sign in the sky or on earth." Ahaz said to Isaiah, "I will not ask for a sign, because I will not test the Lord to see if what He says is true."

13. Isaiah said to the king, "Why not do what the Lord says? Are you afraid that the sign you ask for won't happen, or that He won't do what He says? The Lord will give you a sign."

14-16. "A young woman who is still a virgin will have a baby boy. He will be called Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.' Before he can drink milk on his own and tell right from wrong, both Syria and Israel will be defeated by the Assyrians."

17-20. "The Lord will let the Assyrians invade your country too. He will also call for the Egyptians to come against you. The king of Assyria will take some of your people away as captives to his own land."

21-25. "At that time a farmer will be thankful if he has just one cow or two sheep. There will be no milk or honey. No one will take care of the vineyards. Soon they'll be full of weeds and thorns. Men will go there to hunt. Farmlands will also be overgrown; cows and goats will go there to graze."

Assyria and Israel

8 The Lord said, "Take a large board and write on it in big letters: **THE SPOILER SPEEDS. THE PLUNDERER IS ON HIS WAY.** Write it large enough so that everyone can read it. Have Uriah and Zechariah watch you write it."

3-4. When my wife, who also had the gift of prophecy, became pregnant, the Lord said to us, "Give your son a name that means what the sign says. Before he's old enough to say 'Father' or 'Mother,' the northern kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Syria will be defeated by the Assyrians."

5-6. The Lord spoke to me again and said, "The people of Judah refused to believe Me when I said I would protect them. So they went and asked the king of Assyria to come and defeat their enemies."

7-8. "I will let him come. He will defeat Israel and Syria, but his armies will also invade the land of Judah. Like a huge bird, he will cast his shadow over the whole country." But listen, people; God will not forsake us.

9-10. Go ahead, you two nations. Give the battle cry and attack. But don't forget that the Lord is on Judah's side. In His own way, He will defeat you. So go ahead with your plans to take Jerusalem, but it won't work, because God will help us.

A Warning to Isaiah

11-13. Again the Lord spoke to me and

said, "Don't support the peace treaty that the people want to make. Don't be afraid. Keep your eyes on Me."

14-15. "I will protect those who trust Me. But those who don't believe Me will trip and fall. They will see the results of their sin of not trusting Me. The king of Assyria will come into the land; some people will be killed, and others taken captive."

16-18. So people, listen to me. I will not support a treaty with Assyria or Egypt. I will keep my eyes on the Lord. Yes, He will discipline us, but I trust Him. My hope is in Him. My wife and my children are with me. The Lord is still here and has decided to use our faith in Him as a sign of His grace.

19. When some people say that we should consult the spirits about the future, don't listen to them. Why not go to God and ask Him? Why go to wizards or to those who say they can speak with the dead? The dead don't know anything.

20. Go to the word of God. If anyone says things that don't agree with it, there's no light in them.

21-22. The time is coming when hunger will be everywhere. People will get angry and will curse the king and God. They will see nothing but darkness, distress, and gloom.

A New Day

9 But a time is coming when there will be no more darkness and gloom. The Lord will bless the whole land from east to west and north to south. Those who didn't know God will see light. Their spiritual darkness will be flooded with light.

3-5. The Lord will enlarge our country and bring us great joy. The people will rejoice as they do at the end of a big harvest. He will defeat the nations that took them captive. The army that

invaded our land with heavy boots and bloodstained banners are destined for the fire of the Lord.

6-7. A Child will be born among us. God's Son will be given to us. The government will be upon His shoulders. He shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. He will sit on David's throne and do what's right. His rule will never end. The God of heaven will do this for us.

Israel's Punishment

8-10. But the Lord has a message for the northern kingdom of Israel. The people will know it's from Him. Right now they're saying, "If war comes and our buildings are destroyed, we'll just replace them. If we're short of wood, we'll go to the mountains to get more."

11-16. The Lord will let their enemies come against them from the east and the west. Their leaders and false prophets will be killed. They misled the people. And those who followed them will be destroyed.

17-18. The Lord is not happy with Israel. He can no longer protect the country, and the young people will suffer because of their parents. Wickedness is like a forest fire, burning and destroying everything good.

19-21. The Lord will let their enemies come and invade Israel. People will turn against each other. They'll be so hungry that they'll eat anything they can find, even dead bodies. The tribes will fight among themselves and then turn on the southern kingdom of Judah. The Lord will punish them for this, but His hand of mercy is still being held out to them.

More Troubles

10 Woe to those who make unfair laws. Woe to those who take away the rights of the poor,

rob others of justice, and take advantage of old people and orphans. What will they do when their land is invaded? Where will they go for help? What will they do with their money? They'll be killed or taken captive.

5-10. The Lord says, "I will let Assyria come and discipline My people who have become so wicked. But the king of Assyria will do more than he's supposed to. He wants to destroy My people completely. He thinks he can do the same to Samaria and Jerusalem that he has done to other cities.

11-12. "I will let him carry out his plans against Samaria, but not against Jerusalem. Then I will discipline him for his pride and arrogance.

13-14. "He says to himself, 'By my power and wisdom I've conquered nations and changed their boundaries. I charged into their land like a wild bull and took away their wealth. It was as easy as collecting eggs. Not one country resisted or even peeped in protest.'

15-19. "Can an ax turn against the one using it? Can a shepherd's rod turn itself into a living tree? This is what the king of Assyria is trying to do against Me. Therefore I will bring sickness on his troops, and they will become weak. In one day I will destroy the pride of Assyria. Fire will break out in their forests, and so few trees will be left that a child can count them."

A Remnant

20-22. "Then My people who survive will no longer ask other nations to come and protect them, but will put their trust in Me. A few will return from captivity and will depend on Me. Though there are many people in Israel and Judah, only a remnant will come back home."

23-27. The Lord has spoken, and it will happen: "The king of Assyria will

come against Jerusalem. But My discipline of Judah will be mild, and when it ends, My discipline of Assyria will begin." The Lord will punish Assyria as He punished Egypt in the days of Moses.

28-32. The Assyrians are on their way. They have already captured some of our smaller cities and are surrounding others. Wherever they can, people are trying to get away before the Assyrians come. It won't be long, and they'll come to take Jerusalem.

33-34. But the Lord will bring down our enemies as easily as cutting a branch off a tree. Proud Assyria will be humbled. The king and his generals will come crashing down like large trees in the mountains when cut by a mighty woodsman.

A New Kingdom

11 The royal family of David is like the stump of a tree. It's God's plan that a shoot will come from its roots, and this new Branch will bear fruit. The Holy Spirit will rest on Him as soon as He's born. He will grow in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and power. He will love God with all His heart and obey Him.

3-5. He will be our new king. He will judge rightly, care for the needy, and defend the helpless. When He comes the second time, He will put an end to evil, and the wicked will be no more. He will rule His people with love and justice. Righteousness will be His belt, and faithfulness will be a sash around His waist.

6-7. The wolf and the lamb will then be friends. The leopard will lie down next to a baby goat. The lion will eat grass next to a young calf, and a little child will play between them. The bear and the cow will feed

together, and their cubs and calves will sleep nearby.

8-9. Babies will sit and play next to the hole of a cobra. There will be nothing to harm or hurt in the Lord's kingdom. The earth will be as full of the love of God as the waters cover the sea.

10-11. The Messiah, the Root of David, will bring in righteousness. People from all nations will come to Him. They will come to His royal city to honor Him. In that day He will reach out to His people everywhere and bring them home.

12-13. By His presence He will send a signal to the nations that He will gather His people from all parts of the world to be with Him forever. There will be no more arguments among His people, for they will all love Him and each other.

14-16. Even now the Lord will help our country, if we turn to Him. He will defeat the Assyrians and our enemies from east to west. He can do the same things that He did when He brought us out of Egypt. He can dry up the river Euphrates, as He did the Red Sea. The Lord will make a way for His people to come back from Assyria and from Babylon. They will travel safely through the wilderness, just as they did under Moses.

A Hymn of Praise

12 When the Lord does these things for His people, they will sing, "We praise You, Lord! You were displeased and had to discipline us. We know that You did it for our own good. Now Your presence comforts us and makes us happy again.

2. "You are the God of our salvation. We trust You and are not afraid. You are our strength and our Redeemer."

3-6. With joy they will drink the

waters of salvation. They will sing, "Give thanks to the Lord! We can always call on Him for help. Let every nation know what He has done for us. Proclaim His name everywhere. Sing to the Lord! He has done wonderful things. Tell it to the world! Let His people shout for joy. The great God of heaven is in our midst!"

Visions About Babylon

13 God gave me a series of visions about our enemies, beginning with Babylon.

2-3. I saw a battle flag raised on top of a hill. A commander shouted to his men to attack Babylon. The Lord was calling nations to bring down proud Babylon.

4-5. I listened and heard noises coming from the mountains. Nations were gathering their armies to attack Babylon. This was the doing of the Lord. Troops came from all directions to destroy that proud city.

6-8. The mighty God of Israel will defeat Babylon. The hands of the strong will go limp, and the hearts of the brave will melt with fear. They will be terrified and will groan in pain. Their faces will be filled with horror.

Visions About the World

9-10. The day of the Lord is coming on the whole world. It will be a day of turmoil and cruelty. The whole world will become a wilderness. The stars of heaven will stop shining. The sun and the moon will be dark.

11-12. The Lord will discipline the world for its wickedness. He will put an end to the proud. Those who love Him will be few in number, but they will be as precious as gold.

13-14. The heavens will shake, and the earth will move. The wicked will scatter as deer run from a hunter.

They will be as helpless as sheep. They will run for help and look to their leaders for protection.

The Fall of Babylon

15-19. Again I was given a view of Babylon. I saw many of their people being killed, babies and parents alike. The Medes and the Persians will attack Babylon. They will not care about her silver or gold. They will have no mercy on anyone, young or old. Babylon will be destroyed as surely as God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

20-22. The city of Babylon will never be inhabited again. People won't even pitch their tents there. No shepherd will bring his sheep to graze there. Only owls, wild goats, desert animals, and jackals will live there. The days of Babylon are numbered.

The Lord Loves His People

14 The Lord loves His people. He will bring them back from captivity in Babylon. Other nations will help them and serve them.

3-6. The Lord will take away the pain and suffering of His people. They will rest from their bondage. When the Lord does this, His people will sing of their freedom, saying, "The king of Babylon has fallen! Our oppression is over! The Lord has struck down the wicked. He has humbled Babylon, and no one could stop Him."

7-8. The whole world rests and is quiet. The evergreens break out in song, saying, "The power of Babylon is broken. No longer will her armies invade the land and cut us down."

9-11. The grave is ready to receive the king of Babylon. Dead kings wait to welcome him. If they could speak, they would say, "You have fallen, just as we have. Now you're one of us;

your glory is gone. You're no longer honored and entertained. You now belong to the dead, and worms will eat your body."

The Fall of Lucifer

12-14. How did the king of Babylon fall? The same way Lucifer did. They were both full of pride. Lucifer said, "I will set up my throne in heaven. I will take charge of the angels. I will control the stars. I will sit next to God. I will live on the sacred mountain and help govern the universe. I will be like God Himself."

15-17. But Lucifer was cast out of heaven. Because of his arrogance, he will finally go into the grave and disappear. People will say, "Was he the one who used the king of Babylon to make the nations tremble? Is he the one who will turn the earth into a wilderness and will not let God's people go?"

Babylon and Assyria

18-21. The kings of Babylon lie buried, each in his own grave. Babylon will be taken, and the king will be killed. Other dead bodies will lie all around him. He will not be buried like other kings. He will be thrown into the same pit with his troops. His sons will be killed and will not inherit the land.

22-23. The Lord says, "I will cut off the name of Babylon. Owls will fill her palaces and homes. I will sweep her streets with the broom of war."

24-25. The Lord also spoke against the king of Assyria, saying, "I will crush the Assyrian army. I will chase her troops into the mountains. I will take the Assyrians off the backs of the people."

26-27. "The day is coming when I will do this for My people around the world. I will reach out and touch the nations that are against My people."

The Lord will do what He says, and who can stop Him?

A Prophecy Against the Philistines

28-29. This is the message that the Lord gave me for the Philistines: "Don't rejoice because the great power of Assyria has been broken. Just as snakes die and new ones are born, so a new power will come to invade your land."

30. "The Lord will protect His people, but He will let a famine come into your land."

31. "Babylon has defeated Assyria and will come against you from the north. There is not one weak soldier in their ranks."

32. What answer should God's people give to the Philistine messengers? They should say to them, "We will not ask for your help against our enemies, nor will we be threatened by you. Our hope is in the Lord, and we will find our safety in Him."

A Prophecy Against the Moabites

15 This is the message that the Lord gave me for the Moabites: "In a single night two of your important cities will be destroyed. People will weep and pray to their gods for help. They will cry because other cities and temples have been destroyed. They will shave their heads in grief."

3-4. "They will cry in the public square and shout their prayers from the rooftops. Their strong men will shake with fear, and their hearts will melt."

5-6. From what I saw in vision, my heart goes out to Moab. Her people will become fugitives, weeping as they go, grieving over their country. I saw famine in the land: dried-up

rivers, dead grass, and withered crops. Nothing green was left.

7-9. People tried to escape, taking with them what they could. People cried. Rivers were red with blood. Fighting was everywhere. Yet the Lord did not stop the war. Lions attacked those who escaped the fighting and those who were left in the land.

The End of Moab

16 The people of Moab sent a lamb to the king of Judah as a sign of goodwill. The women of Moab said to the women of Judah as they met along the banks of the river, "Please take us in as refugees. Be like a tree to shade us from the heat of war. Let us come and hide in your land."

4-5. The people of Moab don't know this, but the war will end, and enemy troops will leave. They don't know that someday a Descendant of David will rule the land. His kingdom will be a kingdom of peace. He will govern His people, and justice will be done. His throne will be one of love and righteousness.

6. The king of Judah said to the Moabites, "We know all about your pride and boasting. Now we see that your threats against us were empty words. But we have no strength to protect you, nor room to take you in."

7-8. Then the people of Moab will weep. They will remember the good life they had. They will cry and give up in despair. Their orchards have been destroyed, and their grapevines trampled.

9-11. I cry for the people of Moab. Joy and gladness are gone. Their harvest songs are no more. My heart goes out to those who are suffering.

12-14. The people of Moab had special places of worship where they shouted and prayed for their idols to bless their fields. But their idols

couldn't hear. They couldn't answer the people or protect them. This is what the Lord says: "Moab's wealth will be gone. Her people will be killed; only a few will survive."

A Prophecy Against Syria

17 This is the message the Lord gave me against Syria: "Damascus will be destroyed. Cities will be empty. Sheep and cattle will roam the streets. The northern kingdom of Israel will have no one to protect her. The power of Syria will be gone, and those who survive will be left destitute.

4-6. "The glory of Israel will also end, and all her wealth will be gone. The country will be like a sick man whose body is wasting away. Israel will be like an empty field after the harvest. Some grain will fall and stay. There will be a few olives left on the trees and a few berries on the bushes."

7-9. When that day comes, people will turn to God for help. They will look to the Lord for protection. They will no longer worship idols or bow to their mother goddess. But it will be too late. Their cities will be deserted, and their land will look like a wilderness.

10-11. The true God is the only one who can save you. He is your strong Rock. You made sacred gardens for your idol gods and worshiped them. Even if your gods could make the vineyards grow, they cannot stop the suffering that's coming your way.

12-14. Nations make war. Their armies rush against each other like waves of the sea. No matter how powerful they are, the Lord can stop them all. They will run to the mountains and hide. Suddenly they'll be filled with terror, and by morning they'll be gone. This is what will happen to those who invade our land and plunder our people.

A Prophecy Against Ethiopia

18 Woe to the Ethiopians who now rule Egypt. You sent a message to Judah to join an alliance against Assyria. You're a strong people, tall and smooth-skinned, respected and feared.

3-4. If you look this way, you will see a flag on a mountain. You will hear the sound of a ram's horn. This is the message that the Lord gave me for you: "I have been watching things on earth as quietly as the rising sun. I will walk through the land at night as quietly as falling dew.

5-6. "Before the grape harvest, while the grapes are still ripening, I will cut down the Assyrian forces as easily as a knife cuts a branch from a vine. Their troops will fall, and animals and birds will feed on their bodies."

7. But the Lord will welcome the Ethiopians, those tall and smooth-skinned people. They will come to Jerusalem bringing gifts. They will worship the Lord and thank Him for what He has done for them.

A Prophecy Against Egypt

19 This is the message that the Lord gave me for Egypt: I will visit the land of Egypt riding on a fast-moving cloud. Their hearts will melt, for I will cause a civil war, and they will fight each other. They will struggle for power. Their plans to conquer other nations will be forgotten. They will turn to their idols and consult the spirits of the dead.

4-7. "I will let a cruel king come to the throne and rule Egypt. The waters of the Nile will go down until the riverbed is seen. Other streams will run dry, and the water reeds will wither. Crops planted along the riverbank will dry up and die.

8-10. "Fishermen and their families

will cry. Their hooks and nets will be useless. Makers of linen will lose hope, and garment workers will be sick at heart. There will be no work for any of them.

11-12. "Their officials are fools. Their advice to the king makes no sense. How can they say they are scholars and like advisers long ago? Where is their wisdom? If they are so wise, let them tell the king what the Lord is going to do to Egypt."

13-15. The officials of Egypt are deceived. They can't be trusted. The Lord has turned their suggestions into foolishness. They make Egypt dizzy with advice. She staggers as if she were drunk. There is nothing that the Egyptians can do to stop the Lord's plan against them, no matter who they are.

16-17. The time is coming when the mighty warriors of Egypt will lose their strength. Their best troops will shake with fear when they realize that the Lord Himself is against them. The people of Egypt will be terrified, because they will remember what the God of Judah did to Assyria.

Blessing Egypt and Assyria

18-20. The time will come when the people of Egypt will learn the Jewish language and will take an oath of loyalty to God. They will build an altar to the Lord in the middle of Egypt. Monuments honoring Him will be erected along their border. They will turn to the Lord for help. When they do, He will be strong to deliver them.

21-22. The Lord will make Himself known to them. They will accept Him as their God and will bring sacrifices and worship Him. They will make a vow to serve Him and will keep it. Even though the Lord disciplines them, He will also help them. He will

hear their prayers and make them strong again.

23-24. When that time comes, there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. People from both countries will be friends again. They will travel back and forth without fear and will even worship God together. Israel, Assyria, and Egypt will be a blessing to the whole world.

25. The Lord will say, "Blessings on you, Egypt. You are My people too. Blessings on you, Assyria. You also are the work of My hands. Blessings on you, Israel. You are My special ones."

Depending on Egypt

20 In the same year that the king of Assyria sent his army into the land, the Lord said to me, "Take off your sandals and your outer garment of camel's hair, and walk around barefoot, stripped to the waist." I did what the Lord said as a sign of shame.

3. Then the Lord spoke to the people through me, saying, "My servant has gone barefoot and stripped to the waist off and on for three years. He has done this as a sign against Egypt and the Ethiopians.

4. "I will let the Assyrians invade the northern part of Egypt and take many captives, including some from the palace. They will make them walk barefoot and naked, to the shame of Egypt.

5-6. "The people of Judah who put their trust in Egypt against Assyria will have their hopes dashed. In that day the little nations around Judah will be afraid. They will say, "Look at what happened to Egypt, the one country we depended on to protect us from the Assyrians. If the Egyptians couldn't stop them, how can we?"

A Prophecy Against Babylon

21 In vision I saw the armies of the Medes and Persians sweep across the desert to attack Babylon.

2. Destruction was everywhere. I heard the commanders shout, "Attack! Take the city!" God will use the Medes and Persians to punish Babylon and stop the suffering it brought on His people.

3-4. This vision gave me such pain that I staggered from what I saw. My heart pounded, and I shook with fear. I had looked for a quiet evening at home, but instead the night was filled with terror.

5. In the same vision I saw a banquet hall filled with guests. They were eating and drinking when I heard a command: "Officers! Get your shields and swords! Prepare for war!"

6-8. Then the Lord said to me, "Place a sentry on the walls of Babylon, and let him tell you what he sees. Does he see horsemen and chariots, or camels and donkeys? He should pay careful attention to what he sees." So in my vision I placed a sentry on duty. He said to me, "I will stay alert day and night and watch for the enemy."

9-10. Soon I heard him shout, "I see horsemen and chariots!" Then I heard him shout, "Babylon has fallen! All her gods lie broken on the ground!" I saw the troops of Babylon crushed like wheat. And I knew that the Lord would free His people.

A Prophecy Against Edom

11-12. This is the message that the Lord gave me in vision against Edom: I heard someone shouting, "Watchman! How are things this night? How much longer until morning?" He shouted back, "The morning is coming, but also the night. The night for Edom is on its way!"

A Prophecy Against Arabia

13-17. This is the message that the Lord gave me in vision against Arabia: I saw the people of Arabia traveling in caravans and camping in the dark. They needed food and water. They were running from the sword of Assyria. The Lord said, "Within a year the greatness of the Arabian tribes will come to an end. Only a few of their fighters will survive."

A Prophecy Against Jerusalem

22 This is the message that the Lord gave me in vision against Jerusalem: I saw the people celebrating. They were blind to the coming danger. Our young men were killed, but not in battle. Our leaders did not fight. They were caught trying to escape even before the enemy troops came. I said, "I want to cry. Just leave me alone."

5-7. The Lord will punish Jerusalem. Her walls will be battered down, and she will cry to the mountain gods for help. Men will come riding horses and driving chariots. They'll be ready for battle. The valleys of Judah will be filled with troops. Their horsemen will ride up to the gates.

8-11. The defenses of Judah have crumbled. The people depended on their fortifications. They stored food and water. They broke down houses to get material to repair the walls. They did not ask for help from God, who could have easily stopped the attack. But now it's too late.

12-13. The Lord was waiting for the people to turn to Him. He wanted them to repent, to turn from their gods and stop living in sin. Instead, they continued to celebrate and have wild parties. They said, "Let's eat, drink, and have a good time. Tomorrow we might die."

14. The Lord said to me, "I can't forgive them, because they don't want to change. So they will die in their sins."

The City Treasurer

15-16. The Lord asked me to take this message to the city treasurer: "What right do you have to take the people's money and use it as you decide? What is this monument that you're building to yourself?"

17-18. The Lord can throw you as easily as throwing a stone. He will throw you into a distant country, and there you will die. You will die beside the chariots you love and will be a disgrace to your country.

19-21. The Lord also said, "I will remove you from office and replace you with a treasurer who can be trusted, whom the people can depend on. I will give him the authority you had. He will serve Me and be a kind father to My people."

22-25. "I will give him the key to the palace, and there will be some doors that only he will be able to open and close. He will bring honor and dignity to the royal house of David. The people will feel secure and will listen to what he says. But you are like a peg in the wall that will weaken and break, and everything hanging on it will fall."

A Prophecy Against Tyre

23 This is the message that the Lord gave me against the cities of Tyre and Sidon: Tyre will be destroyed. Her harbor will disappear. Her ships coming home from Cyprus and Spain will hear what happened.

3. Those of you who live and trade in Tyre have become rich. You have sent ships to Egypt and other countries, to bring back goods to make your city the marketplace of the world.

4-5. Sidon, you are also included. You're a fortress by the sea. But you're a disgrace. You should be ashamed of yourself. The oceans will disown you. They will say, "You don't belong to us. You're not part of our family." Egypt will be shocked when they hear that Tyre has been destroyed.

6-8. Those of you who live in the coastal cities should run. Make your way to Spain. Your city had many colonies across the seas. Your merchants were treated like princes.

9-10. The Lord planned all this against your city. He needed to take away your pride and humble your merchants. Go and settle in Spain. No more ships will come to Tyre. Her harbor is gone.

11-12. The Lord has stretched out His hand against the coastlands. The happiness of Sidon has ended. She will be defeated along with Tyre, and her people will be crushed. Even if they escape to the island of Cyprus, they won't be safe.

13-14. Look to the east. Though Babylon is still small and hardly worth mentioning, she will become strong. She will come and attack Tyre and finish what the Assyrians started. Weep, you men of the sea. The city you were proud of is gone.

15-16. Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years. After that she will sing the song of a lonely woman: "I will pick up my harp and walk through the city. I will not be forgotten. I will play and sing, and men will come to hear me."

17-18. Then the Lord will let Tyre be rebuilt and become a port city. Again nations will come and trade with her. But this will not last. Tyre will once more be destroyed and will never rise again. Her wealth will no longer be hoarded, but will be given to God's

people to feed the poor and clothe those who serve the Lord.

A Prophecy Against the World

24 The time is coming when the Lord will punish the whole world and turn it into a wilderness. He will separate the righteous from the wicked. This will include everyone, no matter who they are or what they do. The whole world will lie in ruins. All the cities will be destroyed. The Lord has said this would happen, and it will.

4-6. The proud of the earth will be humbled. The world is full of evil people who have stepped on God's law and turned their backs on His teachings. Therefore the earth will be destroyed, and the wicked will carry their own guilt. They will be destroyed by fire, but God's people will be saved.

7-13. Their vineyards and farms will burn up. The happy drinkers will groan. Their music will stop. Their drums will be silent. Their drinking and partying will end. Their cities will lie in ruins. Someday this will happen to the whole world. It will be like the end of a harvest, when the olive trees are empty and the grapes are gone.

14-16. Those who are saved will shout for joy. From east to west their voices will praise the Lord. The islands of the sea will exalt His name. The whole world will be filled with happiness. The people will sing, "Glory to the One who sits on the throne and to His righteous Son forever and ever."

17-20. I cried out in grief over what will come on the world. People, listen to me. Nothing good awaits you. When it does come, you will want to run but won't know where. The earth will shake and crack open. Like a

straw hut in the wind, it will sway back and forth and fall.

21-22. The Lord will punish the evil angels just as He will the wicked of the earth. Their time of destruction will also come.

23. Then the Lord will make a new earth and will rule from Jerusalem. The moon will cover its face, and the sun will hide its rays. The Lord will reign over His people in Jerusalem, and His glory will flood the city.

A Hymn of Praise

25 Lord, You are my God! I will exalt You and praise Your name. You have done many wonderful things. You have not changed Your plans about us. You have destroyed the cities of the wicked and saved us. Powerful nations will fear You and honor Your name.

4-5. You have helped the poor in times of trouble and the needy in times of storm. You protected the weak in battle. You stopped the violent attacks. You silenced the shouts of warriors. As a cloud brings relief from the heat of the sun, so You brought us relief from the ruthless.

6-8. The Lord will prepare a banquet for His people from around the world. He will serve only the best. He will remove pain and sorrow and destroy death forever. He will wipe the tears from our eyes and remove our disgrace forever. His people who have suffered from the beginning of time will finally be home.

9. In that day the people will say, "This is our God! We have waited for Him, and He will save us! Let us be glad and rejoice, for He has rescued us from the evil one."

10-12. The Lord will reign from Mount Zion in Jerusalem. His enemies will be like straw under His feet. The wicked

will reach out their hands to be saved, but it will be too late. The Lord will destroy His enemies and turn their bodies into dust.

A Song for Jerusalem

26 In that day this is the song that God's people will sing: "We have a new city! We have a new world! Open the gates! Let the people from all nations come in, all those who have done what is right. **3-7.** "God will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are fixed on Him and depend on Him. Trust in the Lord; He is strong to save. He humbles the mighty. He destroys fortified cities. Those who were oppressed are now free. They walk on the ashes of the cities where they were captives. The Lord will smooth the way of the righteous."

8-9. Isaiah said, "Lord, we long for that day. We love You and want to walk in Your ways. We want to do Your will. The honor of Your name is the desire of our hearts. We long for You day and night. When You come, the world will learn what righteousness and justice are.

10. "The wicked never seem to learn how important it is to do what's right. No matter how kind You are or how much grace You extend to them, it does no good. Even in countries where there is justice and doing right is encouraged, the wicked continue to do evil.

11. "They don't realize that one day they will be held responsible for what they have done. Let them see You through Your people. Let them know what will happen if they continue to live in sin.

12-15. "Lord, You are the one who gave us peace. Help our people to know that You have done this. Your

rule is the only one we accept. Those who were against us are now dead, and we will remember them no more. You have made us into a large nation. You have defeated our enemies and restored the honor of Your name.

16-18. "You have disciplined us. When we were captives, we cried to You for help. We cried in pain. We have neither taught the good news of salvation to our own people nor shared it with the world.

19. "But those who died trusting You will live again. They will wake up and shout for joy. The Lord will cover the earth with grace and will raise those who have long been dead."

20-21. Then Isaiah said to the people, "Go and hide in your houses while God's displeasure passes through the land. The Lord is coming to carry out justice and to vindicate His name. Everything done in secret will be made known."

God's Promise

27 Isaiah continued: "The Lord will destroy the devil, that twisting serpent, and God's people will shout for joy."

3-5. God says, "My people are My vineyard. I will water it and watch over it. I will confront My enemies and march against them. They are like thorns and weeds choking My vineyard. I will take them out of My vineyard and burn them up. But if they turn to Me, I will make them part of My vineyard and protect them too."

6-8. In the days to come Israel will bud and blossom as a rose. The Lord has disciplined His people. Israel has suffered much, but not as much as her enemies. The Lord has let His people be captured and taken into exile by a powerful nation.

9. Israel has tasted the consequences

of her sins. She will repent and be forgiven. Her guilt will be removed. The Lord will crush the altars and statues of her idols.

10-11. The defenses that Jerusalem has trusted in will be as nothing. The city will be taken, and the crowds will disappear. Cattle will roam the streets, graze in the parks, and strip branches bare. People will use the branches to build a fire. This will happen. God will discipline His people.

12-13. After that, the Lord will punish Israel's enemies from north to south. He will separate the wheat from the weeds and will harvest the righteous. That day will be a day of rejoicing. The sound of trumpets will be heard. Those who were scattered among the nations will return home and again worship the Lord in Jerusalem.

Warnings

28 Woe to the people of the northern kingdom of Israel, whose glory and pride is about to fade. Woe where the wine flows freely; woe to the drunkards.

2-4. The Lord will let a powerful nation come against you. Its troops will invade the land like a mighty wind followed by a hailstorm. Samaria, the pride of the nation, will fall. The city will be eaten like a ripe fig.

5. The day is coming when the Lord will be the glory of His people. His presence will be like a crown of jewels. The few who are left in Jerusalem will see His glory and be glad.

6. The Lord will give wisdom to the judges. He will give strength and courage to the people. They will look to Him, and He will turn back the Assyrians at the city gate.

7-8. But even in Judah there are unfair judges and bad leaders because of too much wine. Priests and false prophets

claim to have visions and dreams. They predict the future while drunk; their predictions stink like vomit.

9-10. The Lord says, "They make fun of My prophet. They say, 'Who's he trying to teach? What he's saying may be good for children, but not for us. He says things again and again. Here a little, there a little. A rule to follow here and one to follow there. None of it makes sense.'"

11. "If you won't listen to Me through My prophet, then I'll let foreigners invade your land, and they will teach you."

12-13. The Lord wants to help you, but you won't listen. You don't like the way He teaches. He's trying to teach you principles, one at a time, here a little and there a little. But you don't like to be told what to do. You're caught in the trap of your own making and will be taken into exile.

14-15. Listen to the Lord. You say, "We have made an agreement with the spirits of the dead. Whatever disaster comes this way, it won't touch us." But you're depending on lies, making falsehoods your protection.

Promise

16-17. The Lord says, "I will bring in a tested Cornerstone and will build on it a solid foundation. Those who put their trust in Him will not be disappointed. I will make justice and righteousness the measuring line. Hailstorms and floods will sweep away the foundation of lies.

18-19. "Your agreement with the spirits to avoid being killed means nothing. Disasters will hit your country and crush you again and again. Day after day, morning and night, disasters will sweep through the land. If you would listen to what I'm saying, you'd be filled with terror."

20-22. You'll be like a man trying to sleep in a bed that's too short and wrap himself in a blanket that's too small. The Lord will punish Israel as He punished the Philistines in the days of David, or the Amorites in the days of Joshua when the sun stood still. The Lord has told me plainly what will happen, and it will happen.

Wisdom

23-26. Listen to me and pay attention to my words. After a farmer plows and plants, does he keep plowing his field? After he plows and plants, doesn't he let God take over? Doesn't he plant wheat and oats in separate places? Doesn't he rotate his crops each year? God taught him to do all this.

27-29. A man doesn't use a club to get a tiny seed out of its shell. He doesn't drive horses over harvested wheat. He uses methods that separate the wheat from the chaff without hurting it. Once he has the wheat, then he grinds it into flour to make bread. Who taught the farmer all this? The Lord. He is full of wisdom and is an excellent Teacher.

Hope

29 Woe to the city of Jerusalem, the city of David. You let the people have their pagan festivals and worship their idols. But the day of disaster will soon come. God will let your enemies surround you, break down your walls, and attack. Blood will be on your streets. When it's over, your voice will sound as though it's coming from the grave.

5-6. But suddenly your enemies will be gone, like dust blown away by the wind. The Lord will step in with thunder and lightning, with an earthquake, windstorms, and fire.

7-8. Then the armies that attacked

will vanish as a dream in the night. Your enemies will be like starving men dreaming of food, only to wake up hungry. Their dreams of conquering Jerusalem will not come true.

Warnings

9-10. Go ahead. Close your eyes to what the Lord says. You're drunk with your own ideas. The Lord has let you be caught up in your own dreams. He has not shown your false prophets the future. He has not talked to them in vision as they claim He did.

11-12. The Lord will not force you to listen. He will not make you accept what is true. If you ask someone to read what is written, he'll say, "I can read it, but I really don't understand it." Others can't read at all.

13-14. The Lord says, "These people talk a lot about Me. They honor Me with their lips. But their hearts are somewhere else. They worship by rules they make up. I will destroy the wisdom of those who think they're so smart."

15-16. "Some keep their wickedness a secret. They like to work in the dark so that no one will see them or know what they're doing. Then there are those who mold the truth to their own liking. They think that they're the potter instead of the clay. Can the clay tell the potter what to do? Yet this is the way that My people treat Me."

Promise

17. Is it a small thing to turn forests into fields or fields into forests? The Lord can do it. He can destroy or rebuild.

18-19. The day will come when the deaf will hear the word of the Lord, and the blind will be able to see and read. The meek will be filled with joy, and the humble will praise the God of Israel.

20-21. The wicked will be gone, and the ruthless will be no more. Those who made fun of the words of the Lord will disappear. Those who loved evil will be destroyed. So will those who sent the innocent to jail and let criminals go free, who lied to keep an honest man from getting justice.

22. This is what the Lord says: "The time will come when My people will no longer be disgraced; no longer will the faces of My people show fear."

23-24. "When their families are reunited, they will know that it was My doing. They will come and worship Me in gratitude and honor My name. In those days they will understand, and those who innocently did wrong will be glad to be taught."

Treaty With Egypt

30 The Lord says, "Woe to the leaders in Judah who rebelled against Me by making treaties with Egypt that I did not approve. They did not even ask Me. They looked to Egypt for help and put their trust in her military might."

3-7. "But Egypt's protection will end, and her promises will mean nothing. Although your delegation has already gone to Egypt, the people of Judah will be sorry that those treaties were made. Your messengers have loaded their camels with rich gifts and taken a dangerous trip to a nation whose help will be useless."

Judah's Stubbornness

8-9. The Lord told me to write down what He showed me so that it won't be forgotten. Judah is rebellious, and her people are stubborn. They just don't want to listen.

10-11. They keep saying to me, "We don't want you to have more visions, because we don't want to keep hear-

ing what's right and wrong. We want you to tell us something that's fun to listen to, that makes us feel good. We're tired of hearing about the Holy One of Israel."

12-14. So the Lord says, "Because you refused to listen to Me, but depended on the power of evil nations to help you, your plans will be like a high wall that suddenly cracks and collapses. Your hopes will be shattered like a clay pot hit with a hammer."

15-17. The Lord also says, "Your only hope lies in your repentance, in changing your ways and trusting Me. You depend on your fast horses, but the horses of your enemies will be faster. A thousand will run at the sight of one enemy soldier. Nothing will be left of your army except a lonely flag on top of the mountain."

God Will Forgive

18-19. The Lord is kind. He will forgive. He wants to show you that He loves you. He will do what is right and what is best for you. Blessed are those who put their trust in Him. When the people cry to Him for help, He will answer their prayers. He will be kind and gracious. He will comfort them and wipe away their tears.

20-22. Even though He may discipline you and you have some hard times, He will be with you. Then you will listen to His prophet and understand His teachings. You will throw your idols away. And if you turn to the right or to the left, you will hear a voice saying, "Come, here's the way to go."

23-25. The Lord will water your crops and give you big harvests. Your meadows will be green, and your cattle will graze in peace. Your oxen and donkeys will be strong and will plow your fields. Your streams will be full of clear water. God will protect you from

your enemies. You will defeat those who attack you.

26. When God completes His plan, the moon will be as bright as the sun and the sun will give seven times more light. And the Lord will bind up the wounds of His people and heal them.

Assyria's Punishment

27-28. The power of the Lord is great. He cares for His people. His word is like a consuming fire. His voice is like the sound of a powerful waterfall. He shakes whole nations as easily as a woman shakes flour through a sieve.

29. The Lord's people will sing when He takes action. The hearts of the people will rejoice as they go to the Temple to worship the mighty God of Israel.

30-33. The Lord will make His voice heard, and the power of His right arm will be seen. The Lord will fight against the Assyrians and strike them down. There's a fire in the valley waiting for the Assyrian king. When he comes, the Lord will set it ablaze.

Trusting Egypt

31 Those who go to Egypt for help against the Assyrians and don't ask God to help them are doomed. The Lord knows what to do. When He decides to discipline, He will not change His mind. He will rise up against the wicked, against all those who do evil.

3. The Egyptians are only people; they are not God. Their horses are only flesh and blood. When the Lord acts, both he who tries to help and he who is helped will perish.

God Will Protect Jerusalem

4-5. This is the message that the Lord gave me: Just as a lion growls to protect his catch and is not afraid of the shepherds, so the Lord is not afraid of

armies. He will protect Jerusalem and go to battle for it. He will hover over it as a bird hovers over its nest to protect its young.

6-7. The Lord says, "Come back to Me, and I will forgive and protect you. Throw away your idols that you depend on.

8-9. "The Assyrians will fall. Their army will be destroyed. Their warriors will turn and run. The king will hear the news and be terrified. His generals will be afraid." This message is from the Lord, whose presence is like a burning fire and whose word is like a flaming furnace.

The Righteous King

32 The day will come when the righteous King will rule from Jerusalem, and those under Him will administer justice. This King will be a shelter in the time of storm. He will be as a stream of water in the desert or an overhanging rock for shade in a hot country.

3-5. The eyes of His people will be opened, and their ears will be unstopped. Those who stammered will speak clearly. No longer will selfish people be spoken of as generous nor the cheater be treated with respect.

6-7. Fools speak nonsense about the Lord and think up ways to get around doing what's right. They don't help the poor or feed the hungry. Those who lie and cheat to get ahead are constantly coming up with new ways to take advantage of the poor.

8. But those who are good think of good things to do. They're honest and stand for what is right.

Warnings

9-10. Those of you who have no worries, listen to me. You women who love carefree lives, pay attention. In a

little while such living will end. The crops will fail, and no harvests will be brought in.

11-14. Take off your expensive clothes and put on clothes of mourning. Shed tears, for there will be no more rich harvests to provide food. Mourn for your cities, for they will be empty. All their defenses are gone. Wild donkeys will roam the streets, and sheep will feed by empty houses and by towers that guarded the city.

Safe Forever

15-16. But the Lord will once again bless your fields. The dry land will become fertile. The fields will be full of grain. Justice will return, and righteousness will cover the land from east to west.

17-20. There will be peace and confidence in God forever. People's houses will be secure and safe. Though the fields and cities were destroyed, the Lord will bless the land again. The crops will grow, the harvests will be great, and the cattle will roam free.

Prayer for Protection

33 Woe to the Assyrians, who boast of their strong armies. Woe to the traitors in Israel.

Soon Assyria will be stopped, and those who betrayed us will be caught.

2-4. Lord, be gracious to us. We long for You. Be our strength every morning and save us in time of trouble. When You speak, our enemies run, and when You stand up, nations scatter. Your people will strip the fallen army of Assyria as locusts strip a field.

5-6. The Lord is mighty, ruling the universe. He fills the land with goodness and justice. He is our sure foundation, our redemption, and our wisdom. Loyalty to the Lord is our greatest treasure.

7-9. But our land will be invaded. Those who have explored so many ways to peace will weep. Brave men will call for help. Our highways will be deserted. Agreements will be broken, and witnesses will be ignored. Respect will vanish. Fields will lie empty. Trees will wither and die. The fruitful valley will be like a desert.

Warnings

10-13. The Lord says to our enemies, "I will bring honor to My name. Your plans against Me are as useless as straw. Your armies will crumble. Your cities will be set ablaze. Everyone will hear what happens to you and will respect My power."

14. Lord, the wicked are finally afraid. Terror has gripped their hearts. They say, "Who can fight against God? Who can meet Him and still live?"

15-16. But those who do right, who help the poor, and who don't overlook evil will be kept safe by the hand of God. They will live in the mountains. Their bread and water will be sure.

The Righteous King

17-19. The people will see the King in all His beauty. They will see Him rule the whole world. They will say, "Where are the foreign armies?" There will be none. No one will occupy our country or force us to pay taxes.

20-22. Jerusalem will be at peace. We will have festivals, and the land will be secure. The Lord will show His glory. The world will be full of clean rivers and streams. Slave ships will be gone. The Lord will be our judge. He will be our lawgiver. He will be our king. He will rule over us, for He is the one who saved us.

23-24. No enemy ships will come. No one will invade and plunder our land. There will be an abundance of every-

thing. No one will say, "I'm sick." All our sins will be forgiven and wiped away.

Judgment of the World

34 Come and listen, nations of earth. Let everyone hear what the Lord says. He is displeased with the wicked. He will destroy them forever.

4. In that day the stars of heaven will not give their light, and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll. The stars will fall like dried leaves and figs shaken from a tree by a mighty wind.

5-7. The Lord will bring a sword against the enemies of His people. He will bring the sword against Edom and the great city of Bozrah. Their people will be killed, and so will their priests and the prize bulls they sacrifice to their idols.

8-12. The Lord will protect His people. The land of Edom will be ablaze with fires. They will not go out, but will burn day and night until everything is destroyed. The country will look like a wasteland. No one will travel there. Owls and ravens will take over. No king will rule over the land again.

13-15. Palaces will be overgrown with thorns and fortresses with thistles. Jackals will roam the streets. Owls will nest in empty houses. Hyenas will roam the cities, and wild goats will climb over the rubble. Vultures will come there to raise their young.

16-17. Read what the Lord says. He will order the animals to come and fill the land with offspring. Each animal will have its share. They will live there year after year.

The New Land

35 The time will come when the Lord will renew the land. The wilderness will be glad, and the desert will blossom

as a rose. The hills will be filled with fruitful trees, and everyone will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God.

3-4. So strengthen the feeble hands and weak knees. Say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong! Don't be afraid! Our God will come and save us! He will come with power and glory and will destroy our enemies."

5-7. He will open the eyes of the blind and unstop the ears of those who can't hear. The handicapped will jump like a deer, and those who can't speak will shout for joy. Water will flow in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The thirsty earth will be filled with lakes. Barren places where the jackals once lived will be full of grasses and bushes.

8-9. A highway called the Highway of Holiness will be there. The wicked won't be on it, because it's only for God's people. Lions won't stalk to kill, nor will other wild animals threaten life. Everyone will be safe.

10. God's people will come home singing. They will enter New Jerusalem with shouts of joy. They will be crowned with gladness, and sorrow and pain will be no more.

The Assyrians Invade

36 In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah the king of Assyria invaded the land and captured many of the cities of Judah. Then he sent a large army against Jerusalem. The commander stopped outside the city and demanded surrender. Three of Hezekiah's officials came out to meet with him.

4-6. The commander said, "The king of Assyria wants to know what makes King Hezekiah so confident that he can stand up against the Assyrian army. Words can't take the place of

weapons. Who's making him think he can defy Assyria? Is it Egypt? That country is like an old walking stick. If you lean on it too much, it will break.

7. "Or is the king depending on his God? Didn't he order all the Lord's altars in the country destroyed and make the people bring their sacrifices to Jerusalem? How can he do that and please his God?"

8-10. "Let me make you an offer. I'll give you 2,000 horses if you can find troops to ride them. If you can't even do that, how can you fight against a whole army? It shows how weak you are and why you had to ask Egypt for help. Besides, it wasn't our idea to defeat Israel. Your God told us to. Now we've come into the land of Judah."

11-12. The officials said, "Please don't talk to us in Hebrew. We don't want the people to hear what you're saying. Talk to us in Aramaic." The commander said, "I didn't come to talk just to you, but also to the people. They need to know that if you resist, we'll attack and take the city. When we do, we'll make them eat their own filth."

13-15. Then the commander shouted in Hebrew, "Listen, people! Hear the words of the king of Assyria! This is what he says: 'Don't let King Hezekiah fool you. He can't save you. Don't let him tell you that God will take care of the Assyrian army. Did your God save the other cities in Judah?'"

16-17. "'Don't listen to your king! Listen to the king of Assyria. If you surrender, he'll take care of you. He'll let everyone keep what he has and enjoy his vineyards and harvests of wheat until he resettles you in a land just like yours with vineyards and fields."

18-20. "Don't let Hezekiah tell you that God will protect you. Has any god been able to protect his people against Assyria? Did your God protect the

northern kingdom? Did He protect Samaria? So what makes you think that your God will protect Jerusalem?"

21-22. The people who sat on the wall listening said nothing. They didn't answer the commander, because the king had told them not to. Then Hezekiah's officials tore their robes as a sign of grief and went to tell the king what the commander had said.

God's Promise

37 When Hezekiah heard the report, he too tore his robe. Then he took off his royal clothes, put on clothes of fasting, and went into the Temple to pray. He also sent two of his officials with a couple of senior priests to Isaiah the prophet. **34.** They said to Isaiah, "The king wants you to know that today is a day of shame for our people. The king of Assyria sent his officer to demand that we surrender. He even made fun of our God. We know that the Lord heard all this. So please pray that those of us who love Him will be saved."

5-7. Isaiah sent this message to Hezekiah: "Tell the king that this is what the Lord says: 'Don't be afraid of the Assyrians or troubled at the threats of his commander. The king of Assyria has publicly challenged Me, and I will respond. He will hear about a plot to take his throne and will go back home. There he will be killed.'"

Hezekiah Listens and Prays

8-9. Then the commander went to talk with the king of Assyria, who was camped some distance away. The king told him to take part of the army and quickly attack Jerusalem. Then he should come back, so that the whole army could fight the Egyptians, who were coming to help Judah. The king also sent this message to Hezekiah:

10-13. "To King Hezekiah from the king of Assyria. Don't let your God fool you into believing that He'll deliver Jerusalem. I'm sure that you've heard what we've done to other cities who resisted us. You're no different. Did their gods deliver them? The former kings of Assyria have destroyed some powerful cities in their time, and so have I."

14-17. When Hezekiah got the king's letter, he took it to the Temple, spread it before the Lord, and prayed, "O Lord, You are the God of Israel. You are surrounded by mighty angels and rule the universe. Please hear our prayers. Notice how the king of Assyria is insulting You."

18-20. "It's true that the Assyrians have taken powerful cities. They have taken idol gods and thrown them into the fire, but only because those gods were not real. Lord, please deliver us from the Assyrians. Vindicate Your name so that all nations will know who You are."

God Answers

21-22. The Lord gave Isaiah this message for Hezekiah: "I have heard your prayer. This is My answer to the king of Assyria: Jerusalem tosses her head back in laughter as she sees you run from her."

23-25. "You have insulted the God of heaven. Your commander has defied the Holy One of Israel. You boast of how your chariots have crossed mountains, of how your troops have tasted the water of many lands, and of how you will defeat the Egyptians."

26-27. "Don't you know that long ago I decided to let you do this? You conquered all these cities because I gave you the power to do it. The people left in those cities are now as weak as shoots of grass scorched by the sun."

28-29. "I know your plans and your

anger at Jerusalem and at Me. I have heard your insults. Your pride and arrogance have not gone unnoticed. I accept your challenge and will lead you back to your country as if you had a hook in your nose."

30-32. Isaiah also said to Hezekiah, "This year you will eat the corn in the field and next year what comes from that. But the third year you will have a huge harvest. Some of you from Jerusalem will leave Mount Zion and spread across the land, and the Lord will prosper you."

33-35. "The God of Israel gives you this promise: The king of Assyria will not set foot in this city, nor shoot one arrow at it. He won't surround it or attack its walls. He and his troops will go back home the same way they came. I will defend Jerusalem and save it for My name's sake and for the sake of David, My servant."

The Assyrians Defeated

36-37. Then the angel of the Lord went out during the night and killed 185,000 Assyrian troops. When the people of Jerusalem got up the next morning, the commander and his army were all dead. When the king of Assyria heard that, he took the rest of his army and went back home to Nineveh.

38. Later, as he was worshiping in the temple of his god, two of his sons killed him and then escaped. Another son became king in his father's place.

Hezekiah's Sickness

38 In the days of the king of Assyria, Hezekiah became very sick. Isaiah went to see him and said, "The Lord says to get your things in order, because you will not recover. You will soon die."

2-3. Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed, "Lord, remember

how I faithfully followed You and served You with all my heart and soul, and tried to do what's right?" And he began to cry.

4-8. The Lord spoke to Isaiah on his way out of the palace and said, "Go back and say to Hezekiah, 'The Lord has heard your prayer. He will add fifteen years to your life. He will defend this city against the Assyrians. He will give you a sign to help you believe Me. He will make the shadow on the sundial go back ten degrees.'"

9-13. So the king recovered and wrote about his experience. "In those days I said to myself, 'Do I have to die and be robbed of the rest of my years? Will I be taken away from those I love? Will I no longer enjoy my friends or see what the Lord is doing for His people?' I cried and prayed all night. I felt as if all my bones had been broken. I knew that I was dying."

14-15. "My voice became weak. I cried until daylight. My eyes grew dim. I asked the Lord to help me. And He did. He healed me! What can I say? I will walk humbly before Him the rest of my life and will never forget what He has done for me."

16-17. "'Lord, I promise to live for You, to serve You as long as I live. You have healed me and given me back my life. You have forgiven all my sins."

18-20. "'I can't praise You when I'm in the grave. I can't serve You and put my trust in You when I'm dead. Only the living can do that. Only a living father can tell his children how much he loves them.' The Lord has healed me. I will play the harp and sing to Him. I will go to the Temple and praise Him as long as I live."

21-22. Isaiah had told Hezekiah to show his faith in the Lord by making a paste of figs and putting it on his sore. The king obeyed, and the Lord

healed him. Hezekiah had also asked for a sign that he would get well, which the Lord gave him.

The Babylonian Visitors

39 Soon afterward the king of Babylon heard about Hezekiah's sickness and sudden recovery. So he wrote him a letter and sent it with a gift to congratulate him.

2. Hezekiah welcomed the king's officials and felt honored that they had come to see him. He gave them a tour of Jerusalem and showed them all the gold and silver and weapons he had. There was nothing that he did not show them. But he didn't tell them about God or how He had healed him.

3-4. After the officials left, Isaiah went to see Hezekiah and asked, "Where did those men come from, and what did they say? The king answered, "The king of Babylon living in exile sent them and wanted to know about our victory." Isaiah said, "What did you tell them?" Hezekiah replied, "I gave them a tour and showed them everything."

5-7. Isaiah said, "This is what the Lord says: 'The time will come when the Babylonians will defeat the Assyrians and take back their land. Then they will come and attack Jerusalem. They will remember what you showed them and will take all your gold and silver back to Babylon, even your own sons who will be made to serve the king.'"

8. Hezekiah became very sad. However, he was relieved to know that it wouldn't happen until sometime in the future. He said to Isaiah, "The Lord is kind. I thank Him for the peace we will have until I die."

God Comforts His People

40 God says, "Comfort, comfort My people. Speak kindly to Jerusalem and tell her

what the future holds. She will be disciplined, but her sins will be forgiven, and her captivity will come to an end."

3-5. Then Isaiah prophesied, "A voice from the wilderness will cry out, 'Prepare the way for the Lord! Make a highway for our God! Raise the valleys! Lower the mountains! Make the ground level, and smooth the road! The Lord will come to be one of us, and the people will see Him! He said so!'"

6-8. Then a voice said to me, "Proclaim the message!" I asked, "What is the message?" The voice said, "Men are like flowers and dry grass. When a hot wind from the Lord blows on them, their glory fades away. But the word of the Lord will last forever."

9-10. "So go up on the mountain and proclaim the good news. Call with a loud voice to Jerusalem! Say to the people of Judah, 'Your God will come! The Lord will come and will rule with power. He will reward each one for what he has done.'"

11. "The Lord cares for His people as a good shepherd cares for his sheep. He carries the lambs in His arms and holds them close to His heart."

12-13. Who understands how the Lord does things, how He controls the oceans and the heavens? He holds the earth in His hands. He weighs the mountains the way a man weighs a stone. Who can know the mind of the Lord or update Him on knowledge?

14-15. Where did the Lord go to school? Who taught Him the right thing to do? Who showed Him the way to go? Nations are like a drop in the bucket to Him, like a speck of dust on a scale. He picks up islands as if they were nothing.

16-17. All the animals in the world are not a big enough sacrifice to honor God. All the trees in the world are not enough to make the altars that He de-

serves. To Him all the nations together are less than nothing.

18-20. What should we compare our God to? He's not like an idol made of metal, covered with gold, standing on a silver base. A man who can't afford a golden idol makes one of wood. He finds someone to shape it and make it stand so that it won't fall over.

21-22. Don't people know? Haven't they heard how the world began? God sits above the circle of the earth, and people look as small as ants. He stretches out the sky like a curtain, like a tent for us to live under.

23-24. He brings down powerful kings. They barely start to rule when He blows on them. Their influence dries up, and the wind carries them away like dry grass.

25-27. The Lord says, "To whom will you compare Me? Who is equal to Me?" Look up at the night sky. Who made the universe? Who made the stars? Who guides them and calls each one by name? Not one of them ever gets lost. So why do you complain? Why do you say the Lord doesn't notice us? He doesn't care about us?

28. Don't you know that God lives forever, that He always was and always will be? He's the Creator of the universe! He never gets tired and never needs to rest. He knows everything.

29-31. He gives strength to those who are weak and energy to those who are weary. Even young people get tired and stumble and fall. But for those who wait on the Lord and ask for help, He will renew their strength. They will soar like eagles. They will run and not get tired. They will walk and not faint.

God's Promises Help

41 The Lord said, "Be quiet, all you nations, and listen to Me. Get up your courage and

present your case before the universe. Let's see who is right.

2-4. "Who raised up Cyrus and gave Babylon into his hands? Who gave him strength to move forward fearlessly and conquer other nations? Who decided that history should take this turn? It was I, the Lord!"

5. The coastal lands saw God at work. The people of distant lands trembled when they heard His name. So they came together to help each other.

6-7. One said to his brother, "Be strong and take courage!" The craftsman encouraged the metalworker, and the one who holds the metal helped him who hammered out the idol. He said, "That's good! It's ready for the fire!" Then they made a stand for the idol so that it wouldn't fall over. They thought it would save them.

8-10. The Lord says to Israel, "You are My servants that I chose. You are the children of Jacob and the descendants of My friend Abraham. I brought you out of Egypt. I chose you to be My people. So don't be afraid. I am with you. I am your God. I will help you and hold you with My right hand.

11-13. "The nations who depend on idols will be put to shame. They will be as nothing. You will look for them, and they'll be gone. I am the Lord. I will strengthen you and hold your hand, so don't be afraid.

14-16. "I am the Holy One of Israel, your Redeemer and Savior. I will come and help you. I will make you a strong tool in My hand. You will smash mountains and turn them into dust, and the wind will blow them away. You will rejoice in the Lord and glory in the God of Israel.

17-20. "When My people are thirsty and need water, I will answer their prayers and come and help them. I will make rivers flow down the moun-

tains and springs bubble up in the valleys. I will make cedars grow in the desert and pines in the wilderness. People will see this and know that I, the Lord, have done all this."

God's Challenge to Idols

21-22. The Lord, the King of Israel, says to the nations, "Come and present your case. Let Me hear your arguments. Bring your gods and let them tell us the future. Let them predict what will happen. Let them explain the meaning of the past."

23-24. "If they can't remember the past and describe the future, then we'll know that they are not gods. Come, bring your idols and let them speak and do something good or bad so that we can know whether to rejoice or be afraid. But your idols can't even move. They can't see or hear. Yet you worship them. That's a terrible sin."

25-26. "I have chosen a man called Cyrus. He will come from the north and will trample whole nations in the mud. Which one of your idols predicted that this would happen? Not one of them."

27. "I was the one who told you. I sent a messenger to tell Jerusalem, 'Your people will come back home. They will come back from Babylon.'"

28-29. "But your gods said nothing. Not one of them answered My questions. Your gods are useless. They can't do a thing. They're nothing but hot air."

God's Servant

42 God said, "Look at My Son and see how He serves Me. He is the Chosen One in whom I delight. When He comes, I will fill Him with My Spirit, and He will bring justice to the world. He will neither shout nor raise His voice. He will not

give rousing speeches in the streets."

3-4. "He will not cut off one who is like a bruised branch nor blow out the life of those who spiritually are like a flickering candle. He will not give up until justice reigns in the world and the islands accept His law."

5-7. This is what God, the Creator of heaven and earth, says: "I have asked My Son to come and live a life of righteousness. Day by day I will guide Him. Through Him I will confirm My covenant, the promise I made. He will bring light to the world. He will open the eyes of the blind and set Satan's prisoners free."

8-9. "I am the Lord; that is My name. I will not give My glory to anyone else. I will not share worship and praise with idols. What I have decided to do will take place. I will always tell you ahead of time what will happen."

A Song of Praise

10. Let's sing a new song to the Lord! Let's sing His praise throughout the world! Those who sail the seas, praise Him. Let the lands and all who live there praise the Lord."

11-13. Let those who live in the desert praise the Lord. Let those who live in the cities praise Him. Let the mountains echo His praise. Let all the people give glory to God and praise His name. Soon the Lord will come as a mighty warrior. He will sound the battle cry and triumph over all His enemies."

God Promises Help

14-15. God says, "I have kept quiet for a long time. But now I am ready to act. I will turn the hills of My enemies into a wasteland. I will dry up their grasslands and gardens. I will turn their streams into dry land and dry up their water supplies."

16-17. "I will lead the blind along roads

they have not known and will guide them along paths that are new to them. I will turn their darkness into light and make the rough places smooth. I will not forsake My people. But I will humble those who put their trust in idols and worship what their hands have made.

18-21. "Listen to Me, you who are spiritually blind and deaf. Is anyone more blind and deaf than My Son? He sees many things, but pays no attention to them. He hears many things, but He doesn't listen to them. He serves Me with all His heart. I am pleased with Him. He will lift up My law and make it honorable.

22. "My people have been robbed and plundered. They have been arrested and put into prison. No one was there to help them or restore them."

23-25. Who is listening to what the Lord is saying? Who let Israel be plundered? Was it not the Lord? Did He not withdraw His protection because of our sins? We did not follow His ways or obey His law. So He let war come into our land. Fires were all around us. Yet we still didn't understand why it was happening.

God Will Save

43 Listen, Israel! This is what the Lord, the one who made us a people, says: "Don't be afraid. I will save you. I have called you by name. You are Mine. When you walk through deep waters, I'll be with you. When you cross swollen rivers, they won't sweep you away. When you walk through fire, the flames won't harm you.

3-4. "I am the Lord your Savior. I will let Cyrus, the Persian, conquer Babylon, Egypt, and Ethiopia. He will set you free and let you come home. You are precious to Me. I will defeat

armies for you and give nations in exchange for you.

5-7. "Don't be afraid. I am with you. I will bring your children home from the east, the west, the north, and the south. I will bring them home from wherever they are. You are My people, a nation set apart for My glory."

8-9. God also says, "Bring to Me those who are spiritually blind and deaf. Have them tell Me which of their gods can predict the future and what will happen next. Let them bring the evidence to prove that their predictions were right.

10-11. "Israel, you are My evidence, My servants whom I have chosen. I want you to know that I am the only God there is. Trust Me. There is no other one beside Me, no one else who can save you.

12-13. "I have told you ahead of time what will happen. When you needed Me, I came to your rescue. No other god has done this for you. I am God and always will be. No one can change what I've decided to do. When I take action, who can stop Me and take you out of My hand?"

14-15. The Lord, the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, says, "To free you, I will send an army against Babylon. I will break her pride and destroy whatever she placed her trust in. I am the Lord your God. I am your Creator and King."

16-18. The One who led our people through the Red Sea, who destroyed the Egyptian army with its horses and chariots, says, "Don't look just at what I have done.

19-21. "Watch for the new thing I am going to do. It's already beginning to happen. Can't you see it? I will make a road for you in the wilderness so that you can come home. I will give you streams of water in the desert. I will

give water to My people, and they will be grateful and sing My praise."

22-24. The Lord says, "You didn't call on Me. You became tired of Me. I didn't ask you to keep bringing Me sacrifices until you were exhausted. You did it, but not out of gratitude. You brought the worst of your animals, not the best. And you came to Me with lives full of sin and wickedness instead of thanksgiving and praise."

25-28. "Yet I'm willing to forgive you. I will erase your sins and forget them. Let's look at your past. Prove to Me that you're innocent. Your ancestors have sinned. So have your teachers. Your leaders have disgraced My sanctuary. So I have to discipline you. I will let destruction come to your land. Hopefully it will help you."

God's People

44 God says, "Listen to Me, My people. I have chosen you. You are Mine. I created you and made you grow even before you were born. I will help you. So don't be afraid. You are My people. I love you."
3-5. "I will water your land and make streams flow again. I will pour out My Spirit on your children and My blessings on your offspring. They will grow like well-watered grass, like willow trees next to a stream. One of them will say, 'I belong to the Lord.' Another will say, 'I'm going to join God's people.' Both will belong to Me."

Idols Challenged

6-8. This is what the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, says: "I am the first and last. There is no other God but Me. If there is, let him speak up. Has he told you the future from the beginning to the end? Let him tell you what's coming now. But he can't. So

don't be afraid. I'm the one who told you what would happen and it did."

9-11. "All those gods that people make and worship are useless. And those who do so are blind. What good does it do to make a god out of metal and worship it? Those who make these gods are only men, nothing more. Let them defend their god. They'll only be defeated."

12. "But these people are committed. They work together and encourage each other. The metalworker takes a piece of metal, heats it in the fire, and hammers it into shape. His work makes him hungry and thirsty, but his idol can't help him."

13-14. "The same thing happens with the carpenter. He takes a piece of wood, carves it, and shapes it into a man. Then he takes it home and has to stand it up. He got the wood from a tree that he himself had planted."

15-17. "Men cut down trees for firewood. Then from another part of the tree they make an idol. They use the wood to make a fire to bake bread. They sit down to get warm and eat, and say, 'This is great.' Then they pray and say to their idol, 'You are our god. Protect us and save us.'"

18-19. "Such people don't understand what they're doing. They're blind. Their minds are closed. They don't stop to think or say, 'Wait a minute. I used half the wood to make a fire and bake bread and the other half to make a god. What am I doing? Why should I worship a block of wood?'"

20. "To worship a wooden god makes as much sense as eating ashes. People who do this get to the point where they're beyond help. There's a strange attraction that takes hold of them. They can't seem to say, 'This wooden god is nothing. It's a lie. And it's actually controlling our lives!'"

Israel Belongs to God

21-22. The Lord says, "Israel, you are My servant, not someone else's. You are Mine, and I will never forsake you. I have forgiven you and wiped away your sins. Like the morning mist, they are gone. Come back and stay with Me, for I am the one who has saved you."

23. Sing, O heavens, for the Lord has spoken. Shout for joy, you mountains and forests. The Lord has shown His love by saving us, and His name is glorified in Israel.

24-25. This is what the Lord, the one who made us and saved us, says: "I created all things. I stretched out the heavens and made the earth. No one was there to help Me. The false prophets and fortunetellers are fools. The words of the wise don't make sense, and their knowledge is not reliable."

26. "But when My servants prophesy and My messengers make predictions, those things will come true. When I tell Jerusalem that people will live there again and that the cities of Judah will be rebuilt, it will happen."

27-28. "I will say to the rivers of Babylon, 'Dry up!' And they will. I will speak to Cyrus and say to him, 'You are My shepherd and will carry out My plans.' He will speak to Jerusalem for Me and say, 'Your people are free and will come back and rebuild you. Your own people will lay the foundation of the new Temple.'"

Cyrus the Persian

45 The Lord said to Cyrus, "I have chosen you to be king of Persia. I will help you defeat nations. I will open the gates of Babylon for you to take the city. I will go and prepare the way. I will cut through the bars of iron and give you the city's treasures. You will know that I am the Lord who has called you by name."

4-7. "I have chosen you to free My people. I have called you and honored you, even though you have not known Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other God. I will strengthen you and help you so that everyone will know that there is no God besides Me. I can bring peace or calamity. I am the God of heaven and earth."

8. "Let the heavens rain down righteousness. Let the people open their hearts to receive salvation and deliverance. I am the Lord."

9-10. "Woe to those who argue with their Maker and forget that they are made of clay. Does the clay argue with the potter? Does it say, 'Why are you making me into this kind of pot?' Woe to those who blame their parents for giving them life."

11. The Lord, the Creator, says, "Do nations have a right to question Me or to tell Me how I should discipline My people?"

12-13. "I'm the one who made the heavens and the earth, the sun, moon, and stars. I have chosen Cyrus to free My people. He will let My people go back home and rebuild My Temple. No one will pay him to do this."

Only One God and Savior

14. This is what the Lord says to Israel: "The wealth and merchandise of Egypt will flow into your land. Tall men from Ethiopia will come to you and say, 'Surely the God of heaven is with you. He is God, and there is no other.'"

15-17. The God of heaven loves His people and saves them. All the makers of idols will be put to shame by the God they cannot see. Israel will be saved by the Lord. She will not continue to be disgraced. Her salvation will be forever.

18-19. This is what the Lord, the one who created heaven and earth, says:

"I am God, and there is no other. Though you have not seen Me, I have not been silent, nor have My plans been secret. I have not asked My people to try to find Me. I have spoken openly and told them the truth."

20-22. The Lord also says, "Come together, you nations who worship idols, who carry around gods of wood and ask them to save you. Who told you long ago what would happen to you? Haven't I told you? Who else can do that? I am the only Savior. So turn to Me and be saved."

23. "I have taken an oath that I will end the captivity of My people. My promise will not change. The time will come when every knee will bow before Me."

24-25. "They will say, 'The Lord is righteous and good.' All who are against Me will be disgraced. But the Lord will save those who love Him and put their trust in Him. They will be declared righteous and will burst forth in songs of praise."

Idols Are Nothing

46 The Lord says, "The end has come to the idols called Bel and Nebo. My people carry them or load them on their donkeys as they go into captivity. The people and their donkeys get tired, but their gods are not able to help them."

3-4. "So listen to Me, those of you who are left. I cared for you when you were babies still inside your mothers. I have carried you in My arms since you were born. I am your God and will care for you when you're old. I will help you."

5-6. "Whom will you compare Me to? Is there anyone like Me? People give gold and silver to a goldsmith to make them a god. Then they bow down and worship it."

7-8. "They lift it to their shoulders and carry it home. They stand it up, and that's where it stays. It can't move. They cry for help, but it doesn't answer. It cannot save them. Fix these things in your mind so that you'll come to your senses."

9-11. "I am God, and there is no other. No one is like Me. I see the end from the beginning. From ancient times I have known what will happen. I will do what I please, and My plans will not fail. I will call a man named Cyrus to carry out My plans against Babylon. He will come like a hungry bird swooping down on its prey."

12-13. "So listen to Me, you who think that the end of your captivity is far away. Your rescue is near. My triumph over Babylon will not be delayed. It will come as planned and will come on time. I will free you and bring you back to Jerusalem. I will bring honor to My people."

The Fall of Babylon

47 The Lord says, "Come, city of Babylon. Come down from your throne and sit on the ground. Once you were unconquered. But you are now a slave. They will shout and say, 'Turn that millstone! Grind that flour! Cross those streams!' People will see you naked, humbled, and shamed. I will let this happen. I will not hold back."

4. The Lord will free us from captivity. He is the Holy One of Israel."

5-7. "Sit in silence, city of Babylon. You will no longer be the queen of nations," says the Lord. "I was displeased with My people and gave them into your hand to discipline them. But you went too far and showed them no mercy, not even to the elderly. You said, 'I am queen forever!' You didn't think what might happen to you."

8-9. "Listen to Me. You have given yourself to pleasure. You thought there was no queen like you, that you would never be a widow or lose your children. But in a single day it will happen. It will come on you like a sudden storm, in spite of your gods.

10-11. "You felt so sure of yourself. You thought that no one could hold you responsible. But your own wisdom led you astray. You said, 'I'm like the God of heaven. No one is as powerful as I am.' But disaster will come in a day, and your magic can't stop it. Ruin will come quicker than you think.

12-13. "Keep on worshiping your idols and using your magic. That might scare your enemies, but not Me. You're not as strong as you think, in spite of the advice you get from astrologers and stargazers. Let them save you from what is coming.

14-15. "Their advice is like straw thrown on a fire. They cannot save even themselves. The fire that sweeps through the land will not be like a cozy fire in a fireplace. What good will your astrologers and stargazers be then? They can't save you. Each one will try to save only himself."

Only God Knows the Future

48 Listen to me, you people of Judah. You take oaths in the name of the Lord. You ask God to help you. You worship Him, but you don't mean it. You say that you are residents of God's holy city, and you tell others how you depend on the Lord.

3-4. But listen to what the Lord says: "Long ago I told you what would happen. I spoke to you through My prophets. Then it happened. You were stubborn and resisted Me. I knew you would stiffen your necks. I knew that you would set your minds

against Me until your thoughts were as hard as iron.

5-7. "I told you what would happen so that you couldn't say that your idols had done it. The things that I told you would happen did. My predictions were right. Now let Me tell you some more things—My other plans. Nothing like this has ever happened before. So you can't say that you already knew about it.

8. "Your ears have always been plugged. That's why you never hear what I'm saying. You've always been rebellious. I could never really depend on your loyalty to Me.

9-11. "I have delayed full justice. I have not let you be destroyed. But I have let you be captured and purified as silver in a furnace. For My sake I will rescue you. I will not let My name be dishonored. I will not share My glory with someone else."

God Chooses Cyrus

12-13. The Lord says, "Listen to Me, My people. I am the beginning and the end; I am always present. With My own hands I laid the foundations of the earth. With My right hand I spread out the heavens. When I call to the creatures of the earth and the sky, they listen and come.

14-16. "So listen to Me, My people. None of your idols could have told you about Cyrus, whom I have chosen to defeat Babylon and set you free. He will do it. I have called him, and he will succeed. Come close and listen to what I have to say. I have not spoken in secret but openly."

17. The Lord, the Holy One of Israel, says, "I am God, the one who teaches you what is right and wrong, the one who leads you in the way that you should go.

18-19. "If only you had listened to Me

and paid attention, your peace would have been as the quiet flow of a gentle river and your righteousness as powerful as ocean waves. Your descendants would have been numberless, and I would have protected them from their enemies."

20. The Lord is disciplining you, but He will also set you free. You will be taken captive, but the time will come when you will return home. You will welcome freedom with shouts of joy! This is what nations will say: "The Lord has saved His people and set them free!"

21-22. When the Lord brought us out of Egypt and led us through the wilderness, He fed us with manna and gave us water out of the rock. But He also said, "There will be no peace for the wicked."

The Light of the World

49 Listen, all peoples and nations. Listen to what God's Son says about Himself: "Before I came to earth, God appointed Me to be His servant and messenger. He used My words as He would a sharp sword. He protected Me. He made me His polished arrow. **3-4.** "He said to Me, 'You represent a new Israel. Through you I will display My glory.' Then I replied, 'I worked hard but accomplished little. I spent My strength seemingly for nothing. But God will vindicate Me and reward Me for what I have done.'"

5-6. "Through the power of the Holy Spirit I was born. God chose Me to bring salvation to Israel. He will give Me the strength to do it. He said to Me, 'I have a job for You. You will restore My people and bring to Me those who have asked for help. I will make You a light to the whole world to bring salvation to all nations.'"

7. This is what God says about His Son: "While You are on earth, You will be despised and rejected. But the time will come when kings and rulers will stand up and respect You. Princes will bow down and honor You because You are My Servant, and I have chosen You as My Messenger."

8-9. "I will hear Your prayers for My people. I will help You and protect You. Through You I will fulfill My promise to Israel and give them their inheritance. Say to My people, 'Go free!' and to those in darkness, 'Come to the Light.' The people will come, and I will feed them. They will be My sheep."

10-12. "No longer will they be hungry or thirsty, nor will the sun harm them. He who is full of compassion will lead them beside springs of cool water. I will make a safe road for them to travel on. My people will come from all directions and all lands."

13. Sing, O heavens! Shout for joy, O earth! Let the mountains burst forth in praise! The Lord is good. He comforts His people and shows mercy to everyone who is hurting.

The Hands of God

14-15. Our people are saying, "The Lord has forgotten us. He has abandoned us." But the Lord responds, "Can a mother forget her baby? Doesn't she love and care for it? Yes, it could happen that a mother might abandon her child, but I will never abandon you. You are Mine."

16-17. "I have engraved you on the palms of My hands. How could I forget you? Your sons and daughters will come home and rebuild you. Those who destroyed you will go away."

18. "Lift up your eyes, Jerusalem, and look around you. Your children are coming back! As surely as I live, you will see them. They will be like jewels

to you, like a beautiful wedding gown for you to wear.

19. "You were attacked, and your land was laid waste by your enemies. But after you come back from captivity, your country will be too small for you and for those coming with you. Those who destroyed your cities and left them in ruins will be gone.

20-21. "When those born in captivity come home, they will say, 'This country is too small for us!' Then you will ask, 'Where did all these young people come from? We thought we had lost all our children. We felt like a widow left alone. So where did they all come from? Who raised them for us?'"

22. The Lord responds, "I will speak to the nations. I will signal for them to free your children. They will carry the little ones in their arms and the bigger ones on their shoulders to bring them back home.

23. "Kings will be like fathers to you and queens like mothers. They will bow down before you and honor you. They will humble themselves and treat you with great respect. Then you will know that I am the Lord, and that those who put their trust in Me will not be disappointed."

24-25. Can loot be taken from soldiers or captives from warriors? Yet the Lord says, "Captives will be taken from warriors and loot from soldiers without a fight. I will contend with him who is against you, and I will save your children.

26. "Your enemies will be filled with rage, and they will turn on each other. Then the whole world will know that I am your Savior and King, the Mighty One of Israel."

sell My people to pay off a debt? No, it was because of your sins that I let you be taken into captivity.

2-3. "When I came to help you, why didn't you respond? When I called to you, why didn't you answer Me? Was I too weak to save you from your enemies? I can dry up the ocean by just speaking to it. I can turn rivers into deserts. I can make the whole sky turn black."

4-5. God's Son says, "My Father has taught Me what to say to strengthen the weak and to help those who are weary. He wakens Me every morning and helps Me listen like an eager student. He has opened My ears and given Me understanding. I have not turned away from Him.

6. "I let them strip Me and beat Me. I let them rip out some of My beard. I let them spit in My face and curse Me. I did not retaliate. But God will not let Me be put to shame forever.

7-9. "God will help Me. I have set My face like an arrow toward a target. I have decided to obey the God of heaven. He is always near Me. He will stand up for Me and show that I am innocent. Who will bring charges against Me and accuse Me of sin? Who will prove Me guilty? All those who mistreat Me will be no more."

10. Where are those who love God and obey His Son? Let them put their faith and trust in the God of Israel. The way may be dark with no light, but let them put their confidence in God.

11. But you want to walk in your own light. Go ahead, light your own torch and see where it takes you. Just remember that you will suffer the consequences of your own actions.

Israel's Hope

50 The Lord says, "Do I act like a husband who divorces his wife? Did they force Me to

God Comforts Jerusalem

51 The Lord says, "Listen to Me, those of you who want to do right, who have come

to Me for help. Look back to see where you've come from. Think of Abraham and Sarah. When I called Abraham, he had no children. But I blessed him with many descendants.

3. "I will bless Jerusalem the same way. I will make Judah like the Garden of Eden. Joy and gladness will be found in her, praise and thanksgiving will be in the air.

4-5. "Listen, My people. My law will go out from Jerusalem to all nations, and My justice will become their light. Deliverance is on its way. Even the islands of the sea will look to Me for help and trust Me to save them.

6. "Look at the sky above and the earth below. One day the heavens, as you see them, will vanish like smoke. The earth will wear out like a garment. People will die. But My salvation will be forever, and My righteousness will never fail.

7-8. "Listen to Me, you who know what is right and have My law in your hearts. Don't be afraid of what people say about you. The time will come when your enemies will die and worms will eat their bodies. But My power to save will last forever and extend to all generations."

9-10. Lord, stand up and show Your strength. Stand up as in the days of old, when You delivered us from Egypt, when You dried up the Red Sea for us to walk through on dry ground and helped us on our way to Canaan.

11. That's how it will be again. The redeemed of the Lord will come to Jerusalem with singing. Everlasting joy will be like a crown on their heads. Their hearts will overflow with gladness, and sorrow and sighing will be no more.

12-14. The Lord says, "I am the one who comforts you. Why should you be afraid? Those who are against you are as weak as grass. Have you for-

gotten that I created the heavens and the earth? Those who want to destroy you will not succeed. Your kinsmen who are captives will be set free and will come back home. No longer will they be hungry or die in a foreign land.

15-16. "I am the Lord your God. I can make the ocean move until it roars. I have shared My words with you and covered you with the shadow of My hand. I am the one who stretched out the heavens and made the earth. You are My people."

Captivity Will End

17-20. Wake up, Jerusalem! Stand on your feet! You have tasted the displeasure of the Lord. Your land was devastated by war. You staggered under the load. No one was there to help you, to keep you from falling, to comfort you. Your sons fainted. You were caught like a deer in a hunter's net.

21-23. So listen to Me, those of you who stagger with sorrow and pain. This is what the Lord our God says: "I will take away your captivity and place the cup of sorrow in the hands of your enemies. Those who invaded your land, who made you lie facedown in the streets and stepped on you as if you were dirt, they will taste your pain."

God Will Save Jerusalem

52 Wake up, you people of Jerusalem! God will make you strong again. You will never again be taken captive. Get up from the ground and sit on your throne of freedom. Shake off the chains of your captivity and come back home.

3. This is what the Lord says: "You were taken captive and sold for nothing. But you have been redeemed and set free, also without money."

4-5. The Lord also says, "First, My people went to live in Egypt and became slaves. Then Assyria invaded the northern kingdom of Israel and took them away. Now Babylon has done the same thing to the southern kingdom of Judah. Every day they curse My name and treat My people with contempt.

6. "But My people will return to Me. They will admit that I told them ahead of time that this would happen. I'm the one who said it, and I allowed it to happen."

7-8. How beautiful is the sight of God's messenger coming across the mountains with the good news of our deliverance and the announcement: "God is king!" The watchman will shout for joy. The people will break out in singing. They will see the hand of the Lord on His city.

9-10. Sing, Jerusalem! The Lord is coming to rescue His people and to comfort His city. He will come and save His people, and the nations of earth will see the power and salvation of the Lord.

11-12. Leave! Get out of Babylon! Don't defile yourself with any unclean thing, especially those of you who are called to serve the Lord at His Temple. This time you will not have to leave in a hurry, as you did from Egypt. God will go with you and protect you. No one will harm you.

13. God's Son will come to you. He will succeed in His mission. Then He will return to heaven. His name will be exalted above every name.

14-15. People will be shocked when they see Him. His face will be so bloody and his body so beaten that He won't look human. He will die, but He will come again. Kings and rulers will stand in awe of His glory. They will see things that they never saw before.

The Suffering Son

53 Who believes our message? Who sees the hand of God in all this? It is His will that His Son grow up like a plant out of a dry ground. He will not attract attention by His beauty. There is nothing outward about Him that would make people admire Him.

3. He was despised and rejected, a man of sorrow and full of grief. When He came we turned our backs on Him as if He had no value. He was despised and rejected, but we took no pity on Him.

4-6. He took our pain on Himself. Yet we thought God was against Him and had rejected Him. He was wounded and beaten for our sins. Our punishment was on Him. We have all turned to our own ways. God has placed our sins on Him, and by His wounds we are healed.

7. He was mistreated for us. He was falsely accused. He took all this without saying a word. He was taken to the cross like a lamb taken to slaughter. As a sheep stands silent before those who take its wool, so He opened not His mouth.

8-9. He was arrested, judged, and led away to die. He was taken from the land of the living. He was nailed to the wood for all who deserved to die. He was buried without honor. A rich man donated his grave for Him. He was not violent. He never sinned, and there was no falsehood in His mouth.

10. It was God's will that He should die. God accepted His death as an offering for our sins. But He will rise from the grave and finish what God wants Him to do. He will see the fruit of His labor, and His people will live forever.

11. He will suffer many things, but then He will be satisfied as He sees that what He did was not in vain.

Because of Him many will be saved, because He will die for their sins.

12. The Lord says, "I will honor Him above everyone else. He will share His reward with His people. He will give His life for them and pay for their sins. He will suffer for them and then go back to heaven to pray for them and help them."

The Covenant of Peace

54 Jerusalem, you've been like a widow without children. But now you can sing, because soon you will be like a married woman and will have lots of children. This is what the Lord says: "Dream big! Move your tent stakes. Make your tent larger. My plan is to expand Jerusalem until its influence takes in the whole world.

4-6. "Don't be afraid. Don't hesitate to come back home. I'll take care of you. You'll forget your captivity. I'll be your husband. I'm your Redeemer, the God of all the earth. You've been like a divorced wife, like a bride who's been rejected. But I'm calling you to come back home to My own city.

7-8. "For a little while I left you so that you would feel the consequences of being unfaithful to Me. But with love and compassion I will bring you back home. I hid My face from you only for a little while because I disapproved of your behavior. But through kindness I will show My love for you.

9-10. "In the days of Noah I promised never again to bring a flood on the world. So now I promise not to discipline you this way again. The mountains may crumble, but My love for you will never end. I will not break My promise."

11-14. Then the Lord added, "O Jerusalem, blown by winds of war, with no one to comfort you, I will re-

build you with precious stones, with rubies, diamonds, and pearls. I will teach your sons and daughters as they grow, and great will be the peace of My people. No one will attack you. You'll be safe and will have nothing to fear.

15-17. "If any nation attacks you, it will be defeated, because I will fight for you. I gave people wisdom to work with iron, but they ended up making weapons of war. I gave governments wisdom to maintain law and order, but they created armies to destroy you. But no weapon will touch you. No army will succeed. I will protect you and defend you. I will honor you in front of all people in the world."

God's Invitation

55 The Lord says, "Come! Everyone who is thirsty, come to the waters. Come and buy grapes. Come and buy milk. It's all free. Why spend money for that which doesn't satisfy? Listen to Me! Do what I say, and you will have all the good food you need, and it won't cost you a thing.

3-5. "Listen! Come to Me for bread. You will eat and live and not die. I will give you all the blessings that I promised David. I made him king of Israel and through him gave witness to My power. Through you I will call the nations of the world together. They will come to Jerusalem, because I have decided to honor you."

6-7. Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his ways, and let the evil man change his thinking. Let them come to the Lord, and He will have mercy on them. He will abundantly pardon their sins.

8-9. The Lord says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways. As the heavens are

higher than the earth, so are My thoughts higher than your thoughts, and My ways than your ways.

10-11. "Just as the rain and snow come down from heaven to water the earth, to make the seeds sprout and the fruit grow, so will My word do what I send it to do.

12-13. "You will be set free from captivity and will go out with joy and peace. The mountains and hills will sing, and the trees will clap their hands, when they see you coming home. Trees will begin to grow everywhere. This will be a lasting sign of My promise and of what I have done for you."

Salvation Offered

56 This is what the Lord says: "Do what is right and just. Soon My righteousness will be revealed, and you will see My salvation. Blessed is the man who keeps the Sabbath and stays away from evil. **3-5.** "Strangers will come to join you. Make them feel welcome. Don't let them feel like people who don't have a home. If they keep My Sabbath and do what pleases Me, I will honor them by giving each of them a place in My house.

6-7. "Those who join My people and want to serve Me, I will bring to My holy mountain and will give them the joy of salvation. I will accept their offerings. My house will be a house of prayer for all people."

8. This is the promise of the Lord. He will bring His people home together with all those who want to belong to Him.

Israel's Problems

9-10. Right now the nations are like wild animals ready to attack My people. The Lord will let this happen because the leaders haven't done what

they should. They have not warned the people. They don't stop and think. They're like watchdogs that don't bark. They just lie down and sleep.

11-12. They're like shepherds who don't know how to care for sheep. Everyone does what he wants and thinks only about himself. They say to each other, "Come, let's eat and drink because business is good, and tomorrow will be even better than today."

Israel's Idols

57 Good people die, and no one knows why. People who love God are taken away, and no one understands. But the Lord takes them away to spare them from evil. They will sleep and find peace and rest in death.

3-6. But those of you who are wicked, come and listen to me. The Lord says, "Why do you make fun of good people? Your hearts are full of rebellion. You're the offspring of liars. It's your worship of idols that causes you to sin. You even offer your newborn babies as sacrifices to these gods. Do you think I should overlook this?"

7-8. "You build shrines for your idols on top of every mountain and go to worship them. You take your idols into your houses and bedrooms and worship them there, too.

9-10. "You send officials to other countries asking their kings for help. You even talk with the spirit world, looking for answers. You never give up looking for new gods no matter how weary you are. You seem to have all kinds of energy to worship idols and keep going to them for help.

11-12. "Who are these gods that you care so much about that you turn away from Me? Have you forgotten Me because for a long time I haven't said anything about your sins? Is that

why you don't respect Me? Do you think that what you're doing is right? I will no longer keep quiet, and your gods will not be able to help you.

13. "You cry to your idols for help, so let them come and save you. A strong wind from Me will blow them away. But those who love and trust Me will inherit the land and will worship Me in My Temple."

God Offers Forgiveness

14-15. The Lord says, "Take the stumbling blocks out of the way of My people. Build a road and make it smooth. Get it ready for Me. Though I live in heaven, I will also live in the hearts of those who are humble and kind. I will revive their spirit and give them courage and hope.

16-17. "I will not continue to discipline My people by letting them remain in captivity. At first I had to do this because of their sins. I had to turn My face away because they stubbornly continued their wickedness.

18-19. "I know what they were doing, but I will offer them forgiveness and healing. I will bring them back from captivity and fill their land with peace. I will heal My people and comfort them, whether they're near or far away. They will praise Me for what I have done for them.

20-21. "Those who stubbornly continue in sin are like angry waves that never rest, that churn up filthy things from the bottom of the ocean. There is no peace for the wicked."

Fasting and Prayer

58

The Lord says, "Shout it as loud as you can! Raise your voice like a trumpet and show My people their sins! Day after day they seek Me, and act as if they're delighted to know My ways and do

what's right. They want to see justice in the land.

3-4. "But they say, 'Why should we fast and pray if the Lord doesn't hear us? Why should we worship Him if He pays no attention to us?' You fast and pray, but you still do your own thing. You worship Me out of duty, but not from the heart. You quarrel and continue to fight with each other.

5. "Do you expect Me to listen to you? Am I pleased with only fasting and prayer and not with changed lives? Should I approve of what you're doing?"
6-7. "Let Me tell you the kind of fasting that's acceptable to Me. It's to change your ways, to do away with injustice, to help those who are burdened and brokenhearted. So share your food with the hungry. Open the door to the needy. Give clothes to those who can't afford them.

8-9. "If you do this, My light will shine on you like the morning sun, and your health will be evident to all. When you call on Me, I will answer, and when you ask for help, I will say, 'Here I am.'

10-11. "If you stop oppressing people and speaking evil of others, if you feed the hungry and help those in need, then your lives will be as bright as day. I will guide you and take care of your needs. I will bless you, give you good harvests, and keep you strong and well. Your lives will be like a fresh spring of water.

12. "I will help you rebuild the foundations laid by previous generations. You will be known as the people who restore things, as the repairers of broken walls and the builders of roads to go on.

13-14. "If you stop breaking My Sabbath by doing what you please on My holy day, and honor it, making it a happy day, I will bless you. You will be honored all over the world and will be

glad that you're My people." The Lord Himself said this to me.

Isaiah Points Out Sin

59 The Lord is not so far away that He cannot save you. His ears are not deaf, that He can't hear you. It's your sins that have put a wall between you and Him. Your wickedness has made Him hide His face and not listen to you.

3-6. There's murder and violence in your streets and lies in your mouth. No one calls out for justice or asks for truth. You lie and give birth to more evil, like hatching poisonous snakes. You try to cover your evil deeds and make them look good, but it's like putting on clothes made of spiderwebs.

7-8. You rush into sin without thinking, because your thoughts are evil. You don't know what it means to be honest and good. By your example you make others do the same thing.

The People Confess

9-11. "O Lord, now we know why You don't help us. We look for justice and light, but see only evil and darkness. We grope along as if we're blind. We stumble in daylight as if it were night. We're as good as dead. We want to be saved, but deliverance never seems to come.

12-13. "Lord, we have committed many sins. This shows the kind of people we are, and we know it. We've been rebellious. We've turned our backs on You and on those in need, even on those who tried to follow You. We lied and spread rumors everywhere.

14-15. "Justice is gone, and righteousness can't be found. Truth has fallen in the streets, and honesty is not welcome. Whoever tries to do right ends up a victim."

God Answers

16-17. The Lord was displeased with us because of what He saw. He didn't see anyone helping the poor or pleading for those who are oppressed. The Lord will step in. His goodness will give Him the victory. His armor is righteousness and His helmet salvation. He wears the clothes of justice and is dressed in holy zeal.

18-19. He will repay the wicked for their wickedness and His enemies for what they have done. From the rising sun in the east to the setting sun in the west, people will glorify His name. When His enemies come against Him, the Spirit of the Lord will sweep them away like in a flood.

20-21. The Lord says, "The Redeemer will come to Jerusalem. He will come to save His people. And I will keep My promise to put My Spirit upon you and My words in your mouth. They will be in the mouths of your children in every generation forever."

Jerusalem's Future

60 Then the Lord said, "It's time to shine, Jerusalem! Your light has come, and My glory is shining upon you! Darkness covers the earth and deep darkness covers the people. But you will walk in the light of My glory and attract the attention of nations and kings.

4-5. "Look and see what's happening! Your people are preparing to come home from Babylon! Your sons and daughters and their children will come back. You will see this with your own eyes and be filled with joy.

6-9. "The Lord's plan is for the wealth of nations to come to your land. Businessmen and merchants will come with their sacrifices to praise the God of Israel. I will make My Temple more glorious than ever. Look at the sailing

ships flying along like clouds, bringing silver and gold from distant lands to honor the God of Jacob.

10-12. "Though I have disciplined you, I will show you mercy. Kings will help rebuild your walls. Your gates will never be shut. Nations will bring their wealth to you and parade down your streets in celebration. The nations that refuse to serve you will perish.

13-14. "The wood products of Lebanon will come to you to beautify My Temple and city. Those who oppressed you will bow before you. Those who despised you will show their respect. They will call you the city of the Lord, the city of Israel's God.

15-16. "Although you have been forsaken and hated, a city deserted, I will make you great and beautiful again. You will be the joy of endless generations. Nations will care for you and nurse you back to health. When this happens, you will know for sure that I am your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel.

17-18. "I will bring gold and silver to your land. Peace will be your governor and justice your ruler. Violence and destruction will be gone. Your walls will be called Salvation and your gates Praise.

19-20. "You will no longer need the sun to lighten your day or the moon at night, because the presence of God will be your light by day and night. Your days of grief will end.

21-22. "Everyone will do what is right, and you will live in the land forever. I have made you My people to show My greatness and compassion. A few of you will be as strong as 1,000, and the weak among you will be as strong as a nation. I will do this. I will make it happen, for I am the Lord!"

A Message of Freedom

61 God's Son says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives of Satan, and to free the people from the prison of death.

2-4. "God has sent Me to proclaim His favor to those who accept Me, and the time of judgment to those who are evil. He has sent me to comfort those who mourn, to replace their grief with beauty, to bring gladness and praise to those who are sad." God's people will be called oaks of righteousness, planted by the Lord to show His grace and glory. They will restore the old roads, rebuild the ancient cities, and repair the destruction of many generations.

5-7. The Lord says, "Listen, My people, strangers will come to help you. They will shepherd your flocks, plow your soil, and harvest your vineyards. You will be priests of the Lord and will be called ministers of God. The wealth of nations will come to you. Your disgrace will end. You will live in your own land, and your happiness will continue forever.

8-9. "I love justice but hate evil. I reward obedience and make a covenant with those who love Me. They will be admired by nations everywhere. All who see them will say, 'These are the people of God, those whom He has blessed.'"

10. My soul rejoices in my God, and I delight myself in Him. He has covered me with the robe of His righteousness. He has given me the crown of a bridegroom and dressed me as beautifully as a bride.

11. As surely as seeds sprout and grow, the Lord will cause righteousness to spring up among His people. All nations will sing His praises.

The Lord Loves Jerusalem

62 The Lord says, "I love Jerusalem. I will not rest until I see her goodness flood the earth like the morning sun and her salvation like a burning torch.

2-3. "Nations will see your goodness and kings your glory. I will give you a new name. You will be like a jeweled crown, like a royal diadem in the hand of the Lord.

4-5. "You will no longer be called the forsaken city, the city God destroyed. Instead, you will be called the Lord's delight, the bride of God. As a young man decides to marry the woman he loves, and as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will the Lord rejoice over you."

6-7. I asked the watchmen on the city walls to pray day and night and not keep quiet. You should also pray and keep reminding God of His promise until He restores Jerusalem and makes her a city of praise.

8-9. The Lord made an agreement with His people and took an oath to carry it out. He said, "Never again will I let your enemies take your grain and grapes. Those who work the fields will eat the grain. Those who tend the vineyards will gather the grapes and bring a sample of the first of the harvest to My Temple."

10. So go outside the city! Clear the stones, build the roads, and raise the flag of Israel!

11-12. The Lord is sending messengers to the ends of the earth. He says, "Tell the people, 'Your Savior is coming, and His reward is with Him.' You will be called God's people, the Lord's redeemed. And Jerusalem will be called the city that God loves, the city that God has blessed."

The Nations Are Judged

63 Who is this coming in the greatness of His strength? It is the Lord! He is coming with power to save. Why is He dressed so splendidly in red? The Lord says, "The blood of those who fought against Me has stained My clothes. The time has come to deliver My people.

5-6. "I looked for support, but no one would help Me. So with My own strength I brought salvation to My people. I made war with the nations and defeated them. They staggered and fell to the ground."

God's Justice and Mercy

7. Let me tell you about the justice of God and the kindness for which He should be praised. Stop and think of what the Lord has done and the good things that await us. He is full of compassion and love.

8. The Lord says, "These are My people. They will not lie or deceive Me. So I will come and deliver them."

9. When His people suffered, the Lord suffered with them. Then God's Son, called the Angel of the Lord, came and saved them. In love He lifted them up and carried them in His arms.

10. But they rebelled, and hurt the heart of the Holy Spirit. Their sinning turned them against the Lord. So He disciplined them, as He said He would.

11-12. Then they remembered the days of Moses. They prayed, "Where is the One who brought us through the Red Sea and guided us through the wilderness? Where is He who put the Holy Spirit in our hearts? Where is He who stood beside Moses?"

13-14. Led by the Lord, our people walked through the Red Sea and safely through the wilderness. Led by a faithful Shepherd, they came into

the land of Canaan, and the Holy Spirit gave them rest. Lord, that's what You did for our people in the past, and it brought glory to Your name.

Isaiah's Prayer

15-16. Isaiah prayed, "Lord, please look down from heaven and come to our rescue. Where is Your zeal and power? Where is Your love and compassion? You are our Father. We have no one else to turn to. Abraham can't hear us, and Jacob can't see us. You are not only our Father but also our Redeemer.

17-19. "Why did You let Your people stray from Your ways and become stubborn and rebel against You? For the sake of the few who love You and serve You, come and help us! Your people have been driven out of the land. Your Temple has been destroyed. You have treated us as if You had never been our God, as if we had never been Your people.

Isaiah Continues His Prayer

64 "Lord, I wish You would come and help us! If You came, the mountains would shake, the forests would be on fire, and the oceans would boil. Lord, let Your enemies see Your power and Your love for Your people. Let them tremble at Your presence.

3-4. "In the past You have done some amazing things. When You came down on Mount Sinai, the whole mountain shook. Before this no one had heard of anyone like You doing this for His people.

5. "You gladly help those who want to do right. But You have been displeased with our wickedness. Since all of us have sinned, how can we be saved?

6-7. "Our sins are like dirty rags. We're like dried leaves blown here

and there by the wickedness around us. No one calls on You for help and takes hold of You with all his heart. So You turned your face and let us suffer the consequences of our sins.

8-9. "But, Lord, You are our Father. You are the Potter, and we are the clay, the work of Your hands. Lord, don't be angry with us, or hold our sins against us. Please help us, because we are still Your people, and we know You love us.

10-12. "Our cities are destroyed. Jerusalem is in ruins, and Your Temple has been burned to the ground. Everything we have treasured is gone. After all of this, are You still holding back? Will You continue to keep quiet and punish us more than we can take?"

God's Judgment

65 The Lord says, "I was ready to help those who didn't ask for Me. I was ready to respond to those who didn't look for Me. I said 'Here I am' to a people who didn't call on Me. Every day I held out My hands to My people. But they are so stubborn—they want to do their own thing.

3-4. "They insult Me by sinning right in front of Me. They offer sacrifices to idols and burn incense on pagan altars. At night they go to the mountains and sit among the graves, hoping to get messages from the dead. They eat pig's meat and drink what they have offered to idols.

5. "Then they have the nerve to say to others, 'Stay away from us! Don't come near us, because we're holier than you are!' This kind of behavior is like smoke in My nose that doesn't go away.

6-7. "I will not be quiet forever. I will not overlook what My people have done. I will let them suffer the conse-

quences of following the wicked example of their ancestors. They also turned away from Me, burned incense to idols, and worshiped them. I will no longer delay but will discipline My people for what they have done!"

8-9. The Lord says, "Just as a man doesn't destroy grapes that are still juicy, so I will not destroy My people who still believe in Me. I will bless the descendants of Jacob. They will inherit the land, and those who love Me will live there."

10-12. "The valleys will be full of sheep and cattle for those who follow Me. But I will let the sword come into the land for those who turn away from Me and drink to the god of fortune. I called to My people, but they didn't answer. I spoke to them, but they didn't listen. They disobeyed and did exactly what I told them not to do."

13-14. This is what the Lord says: "Those who serve Me will eat, but others will go hungry. My servants will rejoice, but others will be sad. My servants will sing, but others will cry."

15-16. "Because of your sins, I will let your enemies come against you. They will attack and put many of you to death. But I will give My servants another name that no one else will know. All who ask for a blessing will do so in the name of the God who is faithful and true. The troubles of the past will be forgotten."

New Heavens and Earth

17-18. The Lord says, "The time is coming when I will create new heavens and a new earth. You'll be so happy that you won't remember the things that happened before. So be glad and rejoice. I will make Jerusalem a delight and her people a joy."

19-20. "I will rejoice over Jerusalem and delight in My people. There will

be no more sorrow and crying. Never again will babies die in birth or infants be buried because they live only a few days. People who are 100 years old will have just begun to live, but sinners will be no more."

21-23. "My people will build houses and inhabit them. They'll plant vineyards and eat fruit from them. No longer will they be put out of their houses for others to move in. My people will be like trees that never die. They will enjoy whatever they do. Their descendants will not die, and they will be blessed forever."

24. "Before they call, I will answer. While they're still speaking, I will respond."

25. "Wolves and lambs will play together, and lions will eat grass like cows. Snakes will not bite. Nothing will hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain," says the Lord.

False Worship

66 The Lord says, "My throne is in heaven, and the earth is My footstool. How can you build a house for Me? Didn't I create the whole world? I spoke, and everything came into existence. What is more important to Me than a temple is people who are humble and kind, who listen to My word and are eager to do what I ask."

3. "But my people don't care whether they sacrifice an animal or a baby, a lamb or a dog. They don't care whether they bring pig's blood or incense, pray to Me or an idol. They have made up their minds that they will worship the way they please."

4. "I need to discipline them. Disaster will come, the very thing they don't want. When I called to them, they didn't answer. And when I spoke to them, they didn't listen. They closed their ears and chose to do what I didn't like."

The Lord Steps In

5. "Some of you obey Me, so your relatives don't like you. They laugh at you and say, 'Let's see if the Lord will do something special for him. If He does, we'll all be happy.' But I will put them to shame."

6. Do you hear the uproar in the city? The noise is coming from the Temple! It's the Lord defeating His enemies!

7-9. The Lord says, "Jerusalem is like a mother who suddenly gives birth to a baby without pain. Has anyone ever heard of such a thing? Has a country or a nation ever been born in a day? But soon Jerusalem will give birth to a new nation. Do you think I would bring her to this point and then stop her from having a baby?"

10-11. "Rejoice, Jerusalem! Let all the people be glad for her. Those of you who love her and cried over her destruction, come and delight yourselves in her wealth.

12-13. "Her peace will be like a river. The wealth of nations will flow to her like a mighty stream. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort Jerusalem, and she will comfort those who come to her."

God's Kingdom

14. When you see what God will do for His people, you will be glad. Your hearts will rejoice. You will see how kind and merciful God is to His people, and how powerful He is against your enemies.

15-16. Listen! The Lord will come riding the wind, surrounded by fire. He

will show His displeasure with wickedness. He will carry out judgment against evil.

17. The Lord says, "Those who bring pagan practices into My Temple to worship Me, who purify themselves and then do wicked things, who don't listen to Me and eat pigs and mice—all these people will be destroyed.

18. "I know what they've been doing. The time is coming when I will bring all the nations of the world together and let them see My glory.

19. "Just before that I will put a mark on My people and send them all over the world, including the islands of the sea, to speak for Me. They will tell about My greatness and power. They will speak kindly to those who have not heard of Me.

20-21. "They will bring their brothers and sisters to Me from wherever they are. They will bring them to My holy mountain like a joyous offering. They will bring them on horses and wagons, on mules and camels, any way they can. They will bring them to My Temple like a harvest from the field.

22-23. "As surely as the new heavens and the new earth will remain forever, so will My people and their names remain. From one Sabbath to another and from one new moon to another, they will all come to worship Me.

24. "And just as surely as worms eat dead bodies and fire doesn't stop until it destroys, so will the fire of the Lord consume the wicked, and they will be no more."

Jeremiah

INTRODUCTION: *The prophet Jeremiah wrote this book. His ministry covered about forty years, from 625 to 585 B.C. We learn that the people of Judah continued in their wickedness. So to punish them, God decided to let the Babylonians come. Jeremiah urged the king to surrender to the Babylonians instead of fighting them. He told the king that at the right time God would restore His people. But the king refused. The king arrested Jeremiah for suggesting surrender. But Jeremiah was delivering the messages that God gave him. The people of Judah fought against the Babylonians and lost. Jerusalem was destroyed, and many people were taken captive.*

The Call of Jeremiah

1 I am Jeremiah, the son of a priest from the tribe of Benjamin. The Lord called me to be a prophet when Josiah was our king. My ministry lasted more than forty years, until the king of Babylon came and took Jerusalem.

4-8. The Lord said to me, "Before you were born I knew you. I want you to be a prophet for Me." I answered, "Lord, You know I can't speak very well. Besides, I'm too young for this." But the Lord replied, "You're not too young. Do what I tell you and don't be afraid. I'll go with you and protect you."

9-10. Then the Lord touched my mouth and said, "I am putting My words in your mouth, so go and speak for Me. I will tell you what to say. My messages will be for people, nations, and kingdoms. My words will tear down, and then build up."

11-12. The Lord spoke to Me in vision, asking, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" I answered, "I see a large stick made from an almond tree." He said, "That's right. My word is just like that stick. I will use it to change things that need to be changed."

13-15. Again He spoke to me, asking, "What do you see now?" I answered,

"A boiling pot, ready to tip over in this direction." The Lord said, "That's right. Soon disaster will pour in from the north and flood the country. All the cities will be destroyed, including Jerusalem."

16. "I will let this happen because of sin. The land is full of idols. People are worshiping what they have made."

17-19. "I want you to say what I tell you to say. Don't be afraid. I'll protect you. You'll be like a fortified city, like an iron post or a bronze wall. You'll be able to stand against the whole country, the king, and the priests. They'll resist you but won't be able to overcome you because I'll be with you. I am the Lord."

A Message for Jerusalem

2 The Lord told me to give this message to His people in Jerusalem: "The Lord says, 'I remember how good you were when you were young, and how much you loved Me when we got married. We went to live in the land of Canaan. You belonged to Me and to no one else. I brought disaster on anyone who touched you.'"

4-8. Listen to me! This is what the Lord says: "What fault did you find in Me to leave Me and start worshipping

idols? Remember how I brought you through all kinds of dangers and into the land of Canaan? But even the priests have forgotten Me. The leaders have rebelled against Me. And the self-appointed prophets claim to speak for the idol called Baal.

9-13. "I will state My case and bring charges against the people of Jerusalem. Travel from east to west to see if any nation has changed the god it worships. The angels are horrified at what you have done. You have forsaken the spring of living water and are drinking from dirty wells that soon will run dry.

14-16. "My people have become slaves to idols. Other nations are waiting to attack. They growl like lions. They are plundering the land and setting your cities on fire. Your relatives have been killed in battle.

17-19. "You brought this on yourselves. You turned away from Me to your idols. Will you ask Egypt to defend you? Does the water from their rivers taste better than the water I give you? Your own sins are the problem. It will teach you a bitter lesson when you see what it's like to turn away from the God who loves you."

20-22. The Lord said, "You have broken the bonds of love that held you to Me. You said, 'I will no longer serve You.' You turned to idols and worshiped them as gods. Look at what has happened to you. Even if you washed with the strongest soap, you couldn't wash away your guilt.

23-25. "How can you say that you're not guilty? You're like a wild donkey out of control. You keep running after your idol gods until your feet are blistered. You say, 'I can't leave my gods because I'm in love with them. It wouldn't be right.'

26-28. "Just as a thief is disgraced

when caught, so will the priests, leaders, and false prophets be disgraced. They talk to an idol as if it were their father or mother. They have turned their backs on Me, yet when there's trouble, they cry, 'Please save us!' Why don't you let your gods save you? You have lots of them.

29-30. "Why do you complain that I have forsaken you when you are the ones who have forsaken Me? You turned against Me and everything I taught you. I disciplined you, but it didn't do any good. Like raging lions you took your swords and killed the prophets I sent you."

31-32. People, listen to what the Lord is telling you. He says, "Why do you act as if I haven't done anything for you? Why do you say, 'We are a free people and can do what we want'? Does a bride forget to wear her wedding dress? But you have forgotten Me for longer than I like to remember.

33-35. "You've become skilled in wickedness. Even other wicked nations can learn from you. Your land is stained with the blood of the innocent and poor. You keep telling yourself you're innocent and that I'm not unhappy with you. But I will show you what you have done, no matter how much you deny it.

36-37. "You have even turned to the gods in other countries. You have asked other nations to come and defend you. But your officials will come back hanging their heads in shame. The Lord has rejected the help of other nations, so they will not come."

The Unfaithful Wife

3 The Lord said, "If two people get divorced and the wife marries someone else, does her first husband take her back? Of course not. Yet you have worshiped many gods and

think that you can come back to Me anytime you want to.

2-5. "Look at the hills around you. On every one of them there's an idol. The land is full of wickedness. You say, 'You are our God, our Father, our Friend. You have loved us since we were children. So we know You won't turn away from us.' You're using My love for you to cover up the evil you're doing."

6-7. The Lord said to me, "Did you see what the people of the northern kingdom did? They had idols everywhere. I wanted Israel to come back to Me, but she would not."

8-11. "The southern kingdom of Judah saw what Assyria did to her sister, but it made no impression on her. She pretended to come back to Me, but kept right on worshiping her idols. Israel was more honest. At least she didn't pretend."

God's Appeal

12-14. The Lord said to me, "Send this message to the people of Israel who were taken to Assyria: I am not angry. I still love you and am full of compassion. Just confess your sins and admit that you turned away from Me, worshiped idols, and ignored My commandments. Come back to Me, and I will bring you back home."

15-16. "I will give you leaders who obey Me. They will be shepherds after My own heart. They will feed you with knowledge and understanding. Judah and Israel will be united again. There will be no need of the Temple with its Most Holy Place."

17-18. "Jerusalem will be the capital of the world and the throne of the Lord. People from all nations will come to worship Me. My people will live in the land I promised to give them."

19-20. "Once again you will be My

sons and daughters. All I ask is for you to call Me Father and not turn away from Me again as you did before."

21-23. "I hear My people pleading with their gods to come and help them. They have forgotten Me. Come back, and I will help you. Come, I will forgive you and heal you." Tell Him, "Yes, Lord, we will come. You are our God, our refuge and strength, our help and salvation. We have been deceived. These idols can't save us."

24-25. "We have worshiped other gods since we were young. Yet they have not protected us, our sons or daughters, our flocks or herds, or anything we worked so hard for. We and our ancestors have sinned against You and have refused to obey our God."

God Appeals Again

4 The Lord says to Israel, "If you want to return to Me, then make up your minds. Put away your idols and be faithful to Me. If you're truthful, just, and upright, I will make you a blessing, and all the nations will come and praise Me for what I have done for you."

3-4. The Lord says to Judah and Jerusalem, "Break up the hardness of your hearts. Pay attention and serve Me. If you continue sinning, I have no choice but to discipline you. My displeasure will be like a fire that can't be stopped until it burns up everything."

Invasion From the North

5-6. The Lord continued: "Blow the trumpet in Jerusalem and throughout the land. Pick up your weapons and run quickly to the fortified cities. Hurry! Destruction is coming from the north!"

7-8. Listen! Like a lion, a destroyer has set out from Babylon. He's coming to destroy our land. He will take

our cities and leave them empty. Weep and pray, because the Lord is displeased with our wickedness and will certainly discipline us.

9-10. The Lord says, "In that day the king will lose his courage. Priests will be shocked, and false prophets will be amazed at what I will do." Then I asked, "Lord, why do You let these false prophets talk peace and deceive the people when the enemy is coming?"

11-12. Then the Lord said, "The enemy will come like a hot wind from the desert. He will come at My command and without mercy."

13-14. In vision I saw the enemy coming. The dust of his chariots looked like a whirlwind. His horses were as fast as eagles. We are doomed! O Jerusalem, wash the evil from your hearts. Maybe we can be spared.

15-18. Messages from the north tell us that an army is on its way, heading for the cities of Judah and Jerusalem. This will happen to us because we have turned against the Lord. He says, "You have brought this suffering on yourselves by your sins. You have sealed your own doom. It's a bitter pill to swallow and will stab you in the heart."

19-21. My heart aches for Jerusalem. I can hardly bear it. I can't keep quiet, for in vision I have heard the sound of battle. The whole country will be ruined. Our houses will be destroyed, and our families torn apart. How many more times will I see raging battles and hear the shouts of war?

22. The Lord says, "My people are foolish. They don't know Me anymore. They don't understand what I'm trying to tell them. They're full of pride and skillful in doing evil. They think they're wise, but they don't even know how to be good."

23-26. I also had a vision of the whole

world at the end of time. It looked like the ruins of Jerusalem, like the earth was before it was beautified. The sky was dark, the mountains shook, and the hills swayed. I saw no one anywhere. Even the birds were gone. The farmlands looked like deserts, and all the cities lay in ruins because of the Lord's displeasure.

27-28. This is what the Lord says: "The whole world will lie in ruins, yet I will not destroy it completely. The sky will be dark, and the earth will appear to be mourning. I will carry out My judgment against sin and will not change my mind."

29. In vision I saw that at the sign of the coming army, everyone will run. The cities have been abandoned; no one is left.

30-31. Why are you so dressed up? Why are you decked out in jewelry? You're making yourselves look beautiful for nothing. The enemy has come to kill you. You will cry out in pain. You'll be like someone gasping for air and screaming, "I'm going to die! They're coming to kill me!"

The Justice of God

5 The Lord said to me, "Go through the streets of Jerusalem and see for yourself. Can you find one honest man, one merchant who does what is right no matter what the cost? If you can, the Lord will spare the whole city. They say, 'We will love and serve the Lord,' but they don't mean it."

3. I said, "Lord, I know You look for truth and honesty. You disciplined the people, but they didn't change their ways. You increased Your discipline, but they set their faces like a rock and still refused to change."

4-5. Then I said to myself, "The people who are behaving this way are poor

and can't read. I will go to those in power, those who are educated, and talk to them. They'll know what the Lord wants them to do." But I found that they too had turned away from the Lord and rejected His authority.

6. That's why the Lord will let Babylon come from the north and attack our cities. The Babylonians will pounce on us like a lion or a leopard catching its prey. This will happen because we have rebelled against God and turned to idols.

7-9. The Lord says, "How can I forgive them when they turn their backs on Me and walk away? They go to gods who are not real and forget that I am the one who supplies their needs. They go on sinning, trying to please their idols. Should I sit by and do nothing when men go after other men's wives? Should I not punish them?"

10-11. "I will let Babylon come and invade your land. Your people will be cut off like branches from a tree; only a few will survive. Judah has been unfaithful, just like Israel before her. They have turned against their own God!"

12-13. The false prophets have lied. They said to the people, "Nothing will happen. There will be no war. No one will attack us. The prophets of the Lord are just trying to remind us that God is God. So don't take their predictions seriously. They have no message from the Lord. We should put them in jail and let them go hungry for a while."

14. Then the Lord said to me, "Jeremiah, My words will be a fire in your mouth."

15-18. To Jerusalem the Lord said, "I will bring a nation against you whose language you can't understand. Their troops will kill without mercy. They will destroy your cities, kill your sons and daughters and cattle, and cut down your fruit trees. But I will not let them

kill everyone or destroy everything."

19. The Lord spoke to me again and said, "When the people ask you 'why the Lord will let all this happen, tell them why. They have brought foreign gods into the country, so now foreigners will come and take over."

20-22. "Say to the people, 'Those of you who have eyes and ears but can't see or hear what God is saying, listen to me. Shouldn't you respect your God? He is the one who set a limit for the oceans. Their waves cannot go beyond the beach.'

23-25. "But My people don't think about all this. They are stubborn and rebellious. They have turned away from Me. They never say, 'Let's honor our God, for He is the one who sends the rains and gives us good crops.' It's your sins that have kept the rains from coming and your harvests from being large."

26-29. "Evil is everywhere. Wicked men are killing innocent people like birds. They're rich and powerful. There is no limit to their wickedness. They're not interested in helping the orphans and the widows. They don't defend the poor and needy. All they think about is money. Why shouldn't I do something about this? Why shouldn't I punish them?"

30-31. "There's another shocking thing in the land. False prophets talk about peace. The priests believe them, and the people wouldn't have it any other way. But what will they do when all this comes to an end?"

Disaster

6 The Lord says, "Run for safety! Leave Jerusalem! Disaster is coming from the north. Jerusalem is like a beautiful woman, but she will not be spared. Armies will set up their tents around her and destroy her pastures, and no one will dare stop them."

4-5. "They will shout, 'Prepare for war! We will attack at noon!' Then they'll change their minds and say, 'Hold it! We need more time. Let's attack tonight.'"

6-7. "I've told them to cut down your trees and build siege ramps against your walls. I will help them because of your wickedness. Violence and crime are everywhere. Your sins are like a deadly cancer."

8-9. "O Jerusalem, it's not too late. This message is a warning of what is to come. I will have to turn away because of your sins. Your country will look like a wilderness, a place where no one wants to live. Armies will come and strip your country of people, and take them away like a man strips his vineyard of grapes."

10. Then I said to the Lord, "Who will listen to me if I tell them what You said? Their ears are closed. They don't hear a thing I'm saying. As soon as I tell them that this message is from the Lord, they get upset."

11-12. "Yet I burn with zeal for You, Lord. I can't hold back any longer. What should I do? Who will listen to me?" The Lord answered, "Go and preach anyway. First, talk to the young people, then to those who are married, and finally to the elderly, because this will affect them all. Husbands and wives will be separated. Their houses will be taken, and everything else they own."

13. "The people are wicked. Everyone is after money, even the priests and false prophets. They all cheat and take advantage of each other. They don't see that what they're doing is wrong. They say, 'Don't worry. Everything will be all right.'"

14-15. "They like to talk about peace, but there is no peace. They're not ashamed of their wickedness and selfishness. They have no

shame and feel no guilt. I will discipline them and let their land be overrun by their enemies."

16-17. Then the Lord gave me this message for our nation: "You're standing at the crossroads. Stop and take a good look. Which way are you going to go? Look for the old ways, the old paths, the good road, and go that way. If you do, peace will come to your land. But you refuse."

18-21. "Listen, all you neighboring nations. Look and see what will happen to My people. I will discipline them. They will reap what they have sown. They have turned away from Me and rejected My law. I am not pleased with their offerings while they continue to stubbornly sin. I will let trouble come to their land, and it will affect everyone alike."

22-23. "Armies will come from the north and will sweep through the land. A powerful nation is rising up against you. They are well armed and will show no mercy. Waves of horsemen are crossing the land, lined up like troops ready for battle. They're coming to destroy Jerusalem."

24-26. "The people will cry, 'We hear them coming! We're afraid! We feel helpless. We're terrified. Let's leave the city and hide in the country. But let's not walk on the open road. The enemy has surrounded the city and is armed with swords.' My people, repent and change your ways. Weep over your sins as if your only son had just died."

27-30. Then the Lord said to me, "Jeremiah, I have called you to test My people to see what they're like. You'll see that underneath they're nothing but rebels. They're always ready to commit more wickedness. Their hearts are as hard as stone. Troubles don't soften their hearts."

Their wickedness is still there. They have turned away from Me, and I will have to turn away from them."

The Temple

7 The Lord told me to stand at the entrance of the Temple and give the people this message: "Repent and change your ways, and I'll let you live in your land. Don't fool yourself by thinking that all is well because My Temple is here. Don't think that nothing can hurt you.

5-7. "Only if you change and stop taking advantage of orphans and widows, killing innocent people, and worshipping idols will I protect you.

8-11. "You keep holding to the belief that nothing will happen to you as long as My Temple is here. Yet you continue to lie, steal, murder, and sacrifice to gods you don't even know. Then you come to My Temple to worship and tell yourself that all is well. My Temple is not a hiding place for robbers and thieves. I know what you're doing.

12. "Go to the little city of Shiloh, where the sanctuary tent was before you had this Temple. See what I did to Shiloh because of its wickedness. Then go and take a look at the northern kingdom of Israel and see what happened to them.

13-15. "You're doing the same things they did, even though I've talked to you about it many times. What happened to them will happen to you. I will allow Jerusalem to be destroyed, as well as My Temple. I will let your enemies come and take you to a strange land, just as I did to your sister Israel."

16-18. Then the Lord said to me, "Don't pray to Me for these people anymore, for I will not listen. Can't you see what they're doing? The land is full of wickedness. The children

gather the wood, the men build fires, and the women bake cakes to offer to the goddess they call the queen of heaven. They also bring offerings to other gods. I'm supposed to overlook all this?

19-20. "They don't realize what they're doing to themselves. Their wickedness will bring destruction and shame. I will discipline them and pour out My displeasure on this place. The people, their animals, and their crops will all suffer. My discipline will be like a fire that cannot be stopped."

21-22. Then the Lord gave me this message for the people: "Go ahead and bring more sacrifices. They won't do you any good. When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, I didn't tell them only about sacrifices, but also about the importance of obedience.

23-24. "I said, 'Listen to Me, and you will be My people. Walk in My ways, and all will be well.' But they didn't listen. They did whatever they wanted and became more and more stubborn.

25-26. "I sent My prophets to help them, but they didn't listen. Each generation became more determined to do their own thing."

Idols Inside the Temple

27-28. The Lord said to me, "Jeremiah, I want you to tell the people everything I've said, even if they don't listen to you. And they won't. These are a people who don't listen to their own God. Faithfulness is gone, and truth can't be found.

29. "I want you to go to the city square, cut off your hair, and throw it away. Then go to the hills outside the city and sing a funeral song, because I have turned away from My people.

30-31. "The people have set up idols inside My Temple. They worship these idols right in front of Me! Just

outside the city, down in the valley, they have built an altar to a pagan god and sacrificed their babies on it. I never asked them to do such a thing, and wouldn't even think of it.

32-33. "The time will come when many of My people will be killed by their enemies in that same valley. Some will be buried, but many will not, and animals and birds will come and eat them.

34. "In Jerusalem there will be no joy and gladness. The voices of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard. The whole land will look like a wilderness."

False Security

8 The Lord said, "The enemies of My people will dig up the bones of kings, priests, and false prophets. They will spread them on the ground as an act of worship to the sun, moon, and stars. The people who survive will be taken as captives to places so bad that they will wish they were dead."

4-6. The Lord also said, "When a man stumbles and falls, doesn't he get back up? If someone misses a turn in the road, doesn't he turn around? Why do you cling to your idols and refuse to come back to Me? I am listening. But no one is sorry for what he has done. Each one does his own thing, like a horse rushing into battle.

7. "Birds know when to fly north or south. But My people don't care about the laws that govern them.

8-9. "How can you say that you're a wise and understanding people? Your scribes have lied to you with their pens by twisting My words. They will be put to shame. They will be confused when they see what happens. They have rejected My words, and their wisdom is seen to be nothing but foolishness.

10-11. "Armies will invade the land, and their wives and daughters will be taken away. Their property and fields will be given to others. This is because My people are greedy, always thinking about money or social standing, or both. Their prophets and priests are full of lies. They keep saying 'Everything's all right' when it isn't. They talk about peace when there is no peace.

12. "The leaders have lost all sense of shame and guilt. The evil they do doesn't bother them anymore. They don't know what it means to be honest. When the enemy comes into the land, they will be killed along with the people.

13-15. "There will be no more harvests. The fruit trees will dry up, and the grapevines will wither. You will say, 'Why stay here? Let's go to a fortified city and die there. The Lord has turned away from us because of our sins. We wanted peace, but peace never came. We hoped for healing, but have had nothing but trouble.

16. "'The enemy has already entered the land. The ground shakes at the pounding of horses' hooves. The enemy is coming to take our cities and destroy our country.'

17. "Those who escape will be bitten by poisonous snakes and will die. I, the Lord, have spoken."

18-19. When I heard what the Lord had said, I felt sick. I tried to comfort myself by praying, but the pain would not go away. Just listen to the cry of my people! I can hear it now. They say, "Where is the Lord? Is He no longer our king?" The Lord answers, "You have left Me for your idols. Why have you done this?"

20-22. Surely the harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved. I hurt because my people hurt.

Horror grips my soul as I think about what will happen. Is there no healing? Is there no physician in the land? Is there no way for my people to recover?

Jeremiah Cries

9 I wish my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears. I would cry day and night for my people. I wish I had a place in the desert to get away from all the wickedness. Dishonesty rules the land. Tongues are like bows that shoot out arrows of lies. One sin follows another. The Lord says, "They don't even know who I am."

4-6. A person has to be on guard with his own friends. He can't trust his own brother. Family members deceive each other. No one tells the truth. They exhaust themselves with sinning and are too tired to repent. I live in the middle of wickedness and have nowhere to go. As the Lord says: "They refuse to listen to Me."

7-9. Therefore, the Lord says, "I will have to discipline them. What else can I do? They won't listen to anything I say. Their tongues are full of lies. They're friendly to their neighbor, but in their hearts they're setting a trap for him. So why shouldn't I speak up and discipline them? Isn't it right for Me to protect My reputation as their God?"

10-11. When I heard this, I said to myself, "I will cry for my country and pray for my people. The land will soon be desolate and the highways empty. The animals and birds will all be gone." The Lord said, "I will turn Jerusalem into a heap of ruins, and all the cities of Judah will be empty."

12-14. I asked the Lord, "Who understands the reason for this? Has anyone explained it to the people? Don't they have a right to know?" The Lord said,

"You know why. They have ignored My law, which I gave them for their own good. They didn't listen when I told them what to do. They keep turning to idols, as their ancestors did."

15-16. "Listen to what I will do. The people will eat and drink in sorrow and with pain in their hearts. I will scatter them among nations they haven't even heard of. I will let armies come after them with the sword."

17-19. "Stop and think about what I just said. Ask the people to sing funeral songs. Let them mourn over their country with crying and tears. You will hear them say, 'Our country is ruined! Our houses are destroyed. We are being taken from our land.'"

20-22. So I went to the women of Jerusalem and said, "Listen, you need to teach your daughters how to sing funeral songs. Death has come into the city. It will kill our children in the street and our young people in the marketplace. Bodies will be everywhere. Our people will be cut down like a harvest and left lying on the ground."

23-24. Then the Lord said to me, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom nor the strong man in his strength nor the rich man in his riches. Let those who glory, glory in Me and understand that I am the Lord who is just and kind and does what is right."

25-26. "But the days are coming when I will discipline those whose hearts are not right. I will punish My people and those in Egypt and Edom who shave the sides of their heads and wear square beards to honor their gods. These kinds of people are all the same, no matter where they live."

God and Idols

10 People, listen! This is what the Lord says: "Don't do what other nations do. Don't let

them frighten you with predictions from signs in the sky.

3-5. "Their religion is meaningless. They cut down a tree, have a craftsman carve it into a god, cover it with silver and gold, and then stand it up. It can't speak or move. They have to carry it everywhere. So why be afraid of such gods?"

6-7. Lord, I know there is no God like You. You are the Mighty One of Israel. Your name is great. Who shouldn't respect You? You are the king of all nations. There is no one like You among all the wise men, kings, and rulers in the world.

8-10. They go to their idols for guidance, which are no better than pieces of wood. They may be covered with silver and gold, but they're only statues. But You, Lord, are the living God, the everlasting king. When You show Your power, the earth shakes and nations tremble.

11. The Lord says, "This is My message to the nations: The gods You worship did not create the earth and the sky. They will soon be destroyed."

12-13. The God of Israel made heaven and earth. He did it by His own power. He created it out of nothing. When He speaks, the clouds appear, the lightning flashes, and the thunder sounds. He brings the wind and rain out of His storehouse.

14-16. No one understands such power. So the craftsmen will be put to shame, because their gods are worthless. They will all perish. The God of Israel is not like that. He created all things, and has chosen Israel as His people.

The Coming Captivity

17-18. People of Jerusalem, soon you'll be surrounded. Pick up your belongings and get ready to go into

captivity. The Lord says, "I will let you be captured and taken away from your country."

19-21. When I heard this, I said, "I feel as if my heart has been cut with a knife. I thought that when troubles came I could endure them. Jerusalem is ruined. Our young men are gone, taken to Babylon. No one is left to rebuild our houses. Our leaders have no sense. They don't go to the Lord for help. No wonder all this is happening to us."

22. Listen! News has reached us that the armies in the north are coming. They will take our cities and turn them into rubble.

23-25. Then I prayed, "Lord, I know that a man's life is not his own, and that he can't control the future. He can't find the answers inside himself. Discipline us gently, Lord, or we will all die. Pour out Your justice on the nations around us who don't worship You. They have killed Your people and want to destroy our country."

The Broken Covenant

11 The Lord said to me, "Jeremiah, listen to the conditions of My agreement, the covenant I made with My people. Then go and tell them what these conditions are so they can't say they don't understand them. If they obey these rules, they will live.

4-5. "These are the same conditions I gave their ancestors when I brought them out of Egypt. I said, 'Do what I ask you to do, and you'll be My people, and I will be your God.' And they agreed. I promised that if they kept our agreement, I would give them the land you're living in today." I said, "Yes, Lord, I'll go and tell them."

6. Later the Lord spoke to me again, saying, "Go and give My message to the cities of Judah and the people of

Jerusalem. Urge the people to listen and to keep the covenant I made with their ancestors.

7-8. "I brought them out of Egypt, and over the years I had to warn them again and again. But they didn't listen. Instead, they became even more stubborn and determined to do their own thing. So I will let them reap the consequences, hoping they'll wake up."

9-10. The Lord also said, "There's a quiet revolt going on against Me. My people are planning to do more evil. They're going back to the sins of their ancestors. First, the northern kingdom of Israel went its own way; now Judah is doing the same thing."

11-14. "So I will let a disaster come on them from which they cannot escape. When they cry to Me for help, I will not listen. They'll run to their idols for help, but their idols can't stop what's coming. My people have as many gods as there are cities in Judah and streets in Jerusalem. So don't pray to Me for these people, because I will not listen."

15. Then the Lord gave me this message: "Do the people of Judah have a right to come to My Temple asking for help when they continue their evil ways? Can they stop the disaster by bringing Me more offerings? If offerings could solve the problem, they would be happy because they could keep right on sinning."

16-17. Once the Lord called us a beautiful green olive tree. But now He will set that tree on fire. The Lord who planted us in this land will let disaster come because of our wickedness and idol worship.

The Plot Against Jeremiah

18-19. Then the Lord showed me the plots my enemies were making against me. I hadn't realized they

were talking about me when they said something about sacrificing a lamb and chopping down a tree.

20. Then I prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, You are a righteous judge. You know people's hearts and can read their minds. I place my life in Your hands. Please punish them for planning to kill me."

21-23. The Lord said, "The priests from your own hometown are saying, 'If Jeremiah prophesies one more time, we'll kill him.' Therefore, I will punish them. Their sons will be killed in the war, and their daughters will die of starvation. I have set the year of this disaster to come, and no one will survive."

Jeremiah and the Lord

12 I said, "Lord, I know You're right, yet I feel I have to speak up. I wonder about Your justice. Why do wicked people prosper? Why are those who don't believe in You so happy? Lord, You planted Your people in this land like a tree, and they have grown into quite a nation. They speak well of You, but they don't have You in their hearts."

3. "Lord, You know all about me. You can even read my thoughts. You know that I love You with all my heart. These wicked men want to kill me because I speak for You. When destruction comes to our land, please make a difference between them and those who do what's right."

4. "How long will the drought last and our trees not bear fruit? How long will the animals and birds have to suffer and die because of our wickedness? The people keep saying, 'God doesn't care about us.'"

5-6. The Lord said, "Jeremiah, if you can't keep up with foot soldiers, how will you keep up with men on

horses? If you can't face the problems when things are fairly peaceful, what will you do when war breaks out? Members of your own family have joined those who are planning to kill you. Don't trust them, even though they act friendly and speak kindly to you.

7-11. "I will give Judah into the hands of her enemies because she's like a lion that roars at Me. I hate the things that have made her this way. My people are surrounded by nations who look at them like vultures. Armies will destroy the land and turn it into a wilderness. The fields will mourn because no one cares for them.

12-13. "Enemies will come and plunder her cities. The sword will be everywhere. No one will be safe. My people will wear themselves out trying to get on with life, but it won't work. They'll have to bear the consequences of their doings, for I will withdraw My protection."

14-15. Then the Lord spoke to me again, saying, "Also I have something to say about the nations who were so violent against My people. I will overturn them and set My people free. I will have compassion on them and bring them home.

16-17. "But if these nations are willing to learn about Me from My people and will reject their idols and come to Me, I will bless them and accept them as part of My people. But if they will not listen, I will uproot them, and they will be destroyed forever."

A Linen Belt

13 Then the Lord told me to buy a wide linen belt and put it on, but not to let it get wet. So that's what I did. Later the Lord said, "Go to the valley northeast of here and hide the belt in the rocks."

So I did. After some time the Lord told me to go back and get it. I went and pulled it out, but it had rotted and was good for nothing.

8-10. The Lord said, "This is what I will do to the pride of Jerusalem. The people refuse to listen to Me. They're as stubborn as ever and are determined to worship their gods, no matter what I say. They're as useless as this rotten belt.

11. "As a belt clings to a man, as a priest ties a linen belt around him to serve Me, so I have created My people to cling to Me, to be Mine, and to serve Me. I wanted them to be thankful and to praise My name for what I have done for them. But they did not."

12-13. Again the Lord spoke to me and said, "Jeremiah, tell the people that leather wine bottles are to be used for wine. They will say, 'Everybody knows that.' Then say to them, 'Just as leather wine bottles are filled with wine, so is everyone from the king to the priests and false prophets. Not one of them can think straight.'

14. "The Lord will punish them for their sins. Fathers and sons will turn against each other, and so will the old and the young. I will let them reap the consequences of what they have done."

The People's Pride

15-17. People, don't be so proud. Listen to the Lord, for He has spoken. Obey Him before He lets darkness come on you, and you trip and fall. If you don't listen, my heart will break. My eyes will overflow with tears because you'll be taken into captivity.

18-19. The Lord said to me, "Tell the king and queen to humble themselves, or they will lose their crown. Their cities will be taken, the country will fall, and their people will be

taken captive and driven into exile.

20. "Jerusalem, listen to Me. Take a good look. Your enemies are coming. Where are your children? Where is that beautiful flock I gave you, of which you were so proud?"

21-22. How will you feel when the Lord lets foreign captains you made friends with come and rule your country? It will be as painful to you as a woman giving birth. You will say, "Why is all this happening to us?" It's because of your sins. That's why you're shamed and treated so violently.

23-24. Can a man change the color of his skin? Can a leopard change its spots? Neither can you change yourselves to love what is good when you continue to do evil. The Lord will have to scatter you to the wind for you to learn your lesson.

25-27. The Lord says, "This is what will happen to you because you've turned your backs on Me. I will not protect you in your sinning. I will let your enemies come into the land, and all the nations will see your shame. I have seen your wickedness and eagerness to sin even more. O Jerusalem, how long will you continue to be this way?"

War, Drought, and Hunger

14 The Lord said to me, "The country is mourning. Her cities are dying. People are crying for rain. The rich send their servants for water, but there is none. The ground is dry. The farmers hold their heads in despair. The deer in the field forsake their young to go in search of grass. Animals on the mountains have no food."

7-9. I prayed, "O Lord, even though we have sinned, do something for the sake of Your name. Our rebellion is great. You're our only hope. Only You can save us. Why are You like a

stranger who stays only one night? Have You been taken by surprise? Is that why You can't save us? We know You're in our midst. Please don't leave us."

10-12. This is what the Lord said, "The people love their gods. I am not pleased with what they're doing to themselves or to Me. I will not overlook their sins, but will let them face the consequences. Don't pray for them. Even if they fast and pray, I will not listen. I will not accept their offerings and worship. I will let them be consumed by famine and war."

13. I prayed, "O Lord, You know what the false prophets are telling the people. They tell them there will be no war or famine because You promised us peace."

14-16. The Lord said, "The false prophets are lying. I have not spoken to them, nor have I sent them. They think up their own visions. They will be consumed by war and famine just like the people. Their bodies will lie in the streets, and no one will bury them. Their families will reap the consequences of their wickedness."

17-18. Then the Lord asked me to tell the people how I felt. I said to them, "Day and night I cry for you. I can't stop. I foresee many of you being killed in the city and in the country. The priests and false prophets don't know what they're doing to you. They have no idea what's coming."

The People Plead With God

19-20. So I prayed again, "O Lord, have You rejected us? Don't You like us? Why have You let this happen? We hoped and prayed for peace, but there was nothing but trouble. We prayed for healing, but things got worse. We confess our sins. We admit that we're just like our ancestors."

21-22. "Remember Your promises. Don't abandon us. Don't disgrace Jerusalem. Remember Your covenant with us. Please don't break it. Our idols can't give us rain. We're putting our hope in You. You're the only one who can help us."

No More Mercy

15 The Lord said, "Even if Moses and Samuel were pleading with Me, I would not extend mercy to these people. Tell them to go elsewhere for help. Tell them that some will die by the sword, some from hunger, and some will be taken captive to Babylon."

3-4. "I will let some awful things happen. Armies will come and kill; dogs will drag away the dead; vultures will feast on the bodies; and wild animals will eat what's left. Neighboring nations will be horrified by what they see. All this will happen because of the terrible things that Manasseh started when he was king."

5-7. "O Jerusalem, who will feel sorry for you and care about you? You continue to turn your back on Me. I can't keep on protecting you and overlooking your sins. I have no choice but to discipline you. You will be like a straw tossed by the wind. I will let sorrow and pain come on you because you have not changed your ways."

8-9. "There will be more widows in the land than you can count. Young men will be killed, and their mothers will weep. Sorrow and pain will sweep over the land. A mother with seven sons will lose all of them. The day will turn dark. She will live alone, and then die from grief. And those few who survive will be at the mercy of their enemies."

Jeremiah Is Discouraged

10. What a troubled situation I find

myself in! Why was I even born? The whole country is against me. I have to argue with everyone, trying to convince them of the wickedness of our people. They all curse me as if I were against them."

11. The Lord said to me, "I will protect you. There will be a few who will serve Me. And when trouble comes, those who hate you will come to you for help."

12-14. "Can a man break an iron rod with his bare hands? Neither can the people stop what's coming on them from the north. Their wealth and treasures will be plundered and taken away. Their enemies will take My people captive to a foreign land. I will not extend My mercy. The consequence of their sins will be like a fire against them."

15-16. I said, "Lord, please don't forget me. There are some who want to kill me because of the message You told me to give to them. They mistreat and insult me. When You first talked to me I was so happy. Your words were the delight of my heart. I ate them with joy. I wanted to honor You and be known as belonging to You."

17-18. "I never enjoyed being with those who made fun of Your word. I never sat with those who laughed at what You said. My heart would fill with anger over what I heard them say about You. Why does this have to go on and on? Why must I endure so much pain? Why is Your presence like a stream that's drying up?"

19. The Lord said to me, "If you stop complaining, I'll give you the courage you need. If you stop feeling sorry for yourself, then you'll be My messenger again. The people need to change. Don't feel so sorry for them that you change."

20-21. "I will make you like a strong wall that the people can't break

down. I will be with you and deliver you. I will save you from those who want to kill you."

Jeremiah Stays Single

16 The Lord also said to me, "Jeremiah, I don't want you to get married and have children, because of what's coming. Let Me tell you what will happen. Men, women, and children in Jerusalem will be killed in the war. Others will die from the outbreak of disease and hunger. No one will bury them, and animals will come and eat their bodies.

5-7. "I don't want you to visit a family where someone has died and eat the funeral meal with them. Don't mourn with them, because I have taken away the nations's peace. Rich and poor will die. Their bodies will not be buried. No one will comfort the family or bring food to them, even at the death of a father or mother.

8-9. "Don't go to a home where there is feasting and sit down to eat with them. I will bring an end to feasting, to sounds of joy and celebration, and to the happy voices of the bride and bridegroom. All this will happen in your lifetime.

10. "When you tell the people this, they'll want to know why I'm letting this happen. They'll want to know what great crime or sin they have committed.

11-13. "Say to them, 'First, your ancestors turned their backs on Me and worshiped other gods. Now you're doing the same thing, only worse. You stubbornly do your own thing and refuse to listen to Me. So I will let you be taken to another land. There you can serve all kinds of gods, and I will not bother you.'

The Captivity Will End

14-15. "The time will come when My

people will not talk so much about their deliverance from Egypt as about their deliverance from Babylon and other countries from the north. At the appointed time I will rescue them and bring them back home.

16-18. "But for now I will let their enemies hunt them down and fish for everyone that's hiding. I see everything they do; no sin is hidden from Me. I will make them pay for their wickedness. Their disgusting idols are everywhere, and My people bow down and worship them."

19-21. Then I prayed, "O Lord, You are my strength, my help in trouble. I know that if the nations of the world would look to You, confess their sins, and turn from their idols, You would forgive them. People can't make gods. So let the nations see Your power, and then they will know that You are the Lord and we are Your people."

The Country's Sins

17 The Lord said to me, "The people's sins are written with an iron pen on their hearts. They will not change. They even teach their children to worship idols.

3-4. "Therefore, I will let their enemies come and take their wealth and national treasures because of their wickedness. Their enemies will march them away as slaves to a land they don't know."

5-6. The Lord also said, "Cursed are those who put their trust in man's strength and turn to idols for help. They will be like weak little shrubs in the desert or those trying to grow in the salty soil by the Dead Sea.

7-8. "But I will bless those who put their hope in Me. They will be like trees planted by a river. They won't have to worry about rain. Their

leaves will always be green, and they will bear lots of fruit.

9-10. "A man's heart is very deceitful and terribly wicked. Who can know it as I do? I examine hearts and motives and reward each one for what he has done."

Jeremiah Prays

11. Then I said, "The man who gets rich the wrong way is like a bird sitting in another bird's nest to hatch eggs it didn't lay. His desires will control him, and in the end he'll see that he was foolish."

12-13. "Lord, Your throne in the sanctuary above is glorious. It is without beginning or end. You are our hope. All who forsake You will disappear like names written in the sand. We have turned away from You, our spring of living water."

14-15. "Lord, heal me, and I will be healed. Save me, and I will be saved. You are the one I will praise. The people keep asking me, 'What happened to the word of God? Where are the things He said would happen to us? Let's see them!'"

16. "Lord, I didn't run away from Your call to the ministry, but I didn't expect to have to give these kinds of messages. Neither did I pray that something like this would have to happen to the people to wake them up. You know everything I think and say. It's like an open book to You."

17-18. "Don't let me be afraid of You, Lord. You're my only refuge in times of trouble. Let those who want to kill me be confused. Don't let them make a fool of me in public. Help me not to be afraid of what they will do to me. Let them be terrified of You. Let disaster come on them to stop them from killing me."

The Importance of the Sabbath

19-20. Then the Lord said to me, "Go and stand by the main city gate and give the people the message I will give you. Then go to each of the other gates and give the same message there. Urge the king and the people to stop and listen."

21-23. "Say, 'Listen to the word of the Lord! Don't go in and out of these gates to do business on the Sabbath! Honor the Sabbath and keep it holy, as I asked your forefathers to do. But they didn't listen any more than you do. They became more and more stubborn and refused to obey Me. They did not respond to My discipline.'"

24-25. "'But if you obey Me and stop going in and out of these gates doing business on the Sabbath, then I will bless you and your king as I blessed David. Your officials will ride in chariots followed by the leading men of the city, and Jerusalem will last forever.'"

26. "'People will come from everywhere. They will come bringing offerings and gifts to the house of the Lord.'"

27. "'But if you don't keep the Sabbath, I will let your enemies come and set Jerusalem on fire. They will burn down your houses and the king's palace, and no one will be able to put out the fire until it does its work.'"

The Potter and the Clay

18 The Lord spoke to me again, saying, "Go to the potter's house, and I'll tell you what I want you to know." So I went to the potter's house and watched him work. When a piece of clay didn't mold like he wanted it to, he would reshape it.

5-6. Then the Lord said, "Did you see what he did? Don't I have a right to do with My people what the potter does with the clay? The future of Israel is in My hands."

7-10. "The same is true for all nations. When I decide that a country should be punished or destroyed because of its wickedness, and it repents, I will change My mind. But if a nation disobeys and does evil, I will not do the good I intended to do for it.

11. "So tell the people of Judah and Jerusalem that I have changed My mind about the good I intended for them. I will let their enemies come and take them as captives to another country. But if they repent and turn from their evil ways, I will change My mind and do them good.

12. "When the people hear this, they will say, 'Why should we stop doing what we want? Nothing is going to happen. We have no intention of changing.'"

13. Later the Lord said to me, "Ask any nation if anything like this has happened in their country. Do their people turn against their gods and refuse to obey them? The people of Israel have done what is unheard-of among the nations.

14-15. "Does the snow on the mountains ever stop providing water? Do their cool streams ever stop flowing? Yet My people have forgotten the blessings I have poured out on them and have turned to idols. They no longer walk in the old ways, but in the paths they have made.

16. "So their country will be laid waste. All who pass that way will shake their heads in disbelief. They can't understand why a people would turn against their own God.

17. "I will scatter My people just as dust is blown by the wind. I will turn My back toward them when their enemies come against them to destroy their land."

Jeremiah Persecuted

18. When I gave the people the mes-

sage the Lord had given me, they said to each other, "We have to do something about Jeremiah. We have priests and prophets to tell us about the Lord. We don't need him. But let's not touch him. Let's charge him with treason and have him arrested and taken to court. We don't have to keep listening to him." And that's what they did.

19-20. So I prayed, "O Lord, please listen to me. I know that You've heard what my enemies are saying and what they're planning to do to me. They've already dug my grave. Remember how I prayed for them and asked You to save them from disaster? How can they think that I'm against them?"

21-22. "Lord, I have done all I could. If wives have to become widows because their husbands will be killed in battle, so be it. If their children have to die from hunger or by the sword, there's nothing I can do. So let our enemies come, invade the land, and plunder our houses. The people have already dug a pit for me and set traps to catch me.

23. "Lord, You know all this. How can You forgive people who don't repent and change their ways? How can You overlook their crimes and forgive their sins? Let them reap the consequences of what they have sown. Let them be overcome by their enemies."

The Broken Jar

19 The Lord said to me, "Go and buy a clay jar. Then go to the elders and priests and ask them to come with you to the valley outside the city.

3-5. "Say to them, 'This message is from the Lord for the king and for Jerusalem: I will let a disaster come on you that will shock those who hear about it. This will happen because of your sins and idols. You're worshipping

gods your ancestors refused to worship. You have even sacrificed your babies to these gods. This was your idea of what sacrifices were, not Mine.

6-9. "This valley will be known as the Valley of Slaughter. Your enemies will come and slaughter your men in battle. Birds and animals will feast on their bodies. Jerusalem will be surrounded, and the people will be so hungry that they will eat their dead friends and their own babies. Their enemies will not give up until they take the city and destroy it."

10-13. Then the Lord said to me, "Take the clay jar and smash it. Say to the priests and elders, 'The Lord says: I will smash your country and this city just like this clay jar. People will bury their dead here until there's no more room. Their houses and the king's palace will be destroyed, including the places where they worshiped their gods.'"

14-15. After that I went back to the city and said to the people in the Temple, "This is what the God of Israel says: 'I'm going to bring disaster on Jerusalem and on Judah because of your stubbornness and refusal to listen to Me.'"

The Officer of the Temple

20 When the officer of the Temple heard me say this, he had me arrested, whipped, and put in jail. The next day he let me go. I said to him, "Your name should be changed to Mr. Terror. That's the name that the Lord says fits you best."

4-6. "The Lord also says, 'I will bring terror to you and your friends. Some will be killed by the sword while people watch. I will give this nation into the hands of the Babylonians. They will come and take this city and its treasures. And you and your family

will be captured and taken to Babylon. There you and your friends will die and be buried.'"

Jeremiah Gets Discouraged

7-8. Then I said to the Lord, "O Lord, You spoke to me so strongly about Jerusalem when You first called me as a prophet that I thought it would happen soon. But time goes on. If I misunderstood You, why didn't You stop me? Not a day goes by that someone doesn't point their finger at me and laugh. They don't believe what I tell them."

9. "But when I decide to stop preaching and just wait to see what will happen, Your message is like fire in my bones. I try to hold back, but I can't! I will have to speak up no matter what."

10-11. "I hear people saying, 'Look! There's the doomsday prophet! Let's report him.' Even my friends talk that way. They say, 'Let's see if we can trick him into saying something he shouldn't, then we can have him arrested.' But You, Lord, are on my side always protecting me. These people will be disgraced, and they will not forget it."

12. "O Lord, I know that You judge all men fairly. You are the only one who knows people's hearts. Pay back those who have laughed at me."

13. Sing unto the Lord! Praise His name! He rescues the helpless from the power of evil men.

14-15. As for me, I feel like a failure. Forget that I was born. Forget my birthday. Cursed be the day when they congratulated my father and told him that he had a son.

16-18. May that day be a bad day, as the day when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. May it be a day of battle in the morning and of crying in the afternoon. Why didn't they kill me

when I was born? All I've had since I was called to be a prophet is trouble. There's nothing to look forward to but shame and disgrace.

Jerusalem's Doom Is Sure

21 When the Babylonian armies came and surrounded Jerusalem, King Zedekiah sent one of his officials and a priest to come to see me. They said, "Please ask the Lord to help us. Maybe He can send an angel against the Babylonians, as He did against the Assyrians when Hezekiah was king."

3-7. Then the Lord gave me this message: "This is what the Lord says to King Zedekiah, 'If you fight against the king of Babylon, I will bring his army inside this city, and many people will be killed. I will give you into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, and he will execute you and many of your officials.'"

8-12. After the official and the priest left, the Lord said, "Give the people this message: 'I am giving you a choice between life and death. Those who stay in Jerusalem will be killed or die of hunger and disease. Those who surrender to the Babylonians will live. King Nebuchadnezzar will take this city and set it on fire.'

13-14. "'Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You sit there like a queen, telling yourself that no one can conquer you. But I will bring you down from your heights and punish you for what you have done. I will let the Babylonians come and burn down your palaces.'"

Jeremiah and the Kings

22 Before Zedekiah became king, the Lord had asked me to go see King Jehoiakim. So I went and said to him, "This is what the Lord says: 'Do what's right and just. Stop all this crime and violence.

See that people are protected by the law. Help the orphans and widows; stop favoring the guilty.

4-5. "If you do this, then you and the kings after you will come through the city gates riding in chariots and on horses. And the people will cheer when they see their king. But if you don't change, this palace will become a heap of rubble.

6-7. "'You have a beautiful palace that looks like a picture. It is glorious, and you might feel secure, but I will not hesitate to turn it into an empty shell. Armies will come and destroy it and chop down the beautiful beams and throw them into the fire.

8-9. "'People from other nations will pass by and say, 'Why did their God do this to them?' Others will answer, 'Because they turned away from Him and served other gods.' This message is from the Lord.'"

10-12. Then I talked to the people and said, "Don't keep crying and wishing that good King Josiah were back. The Lord let him die early to keep him from being captured and taken away. Remember what happened to the next king? He was captured and taken away to Egypt and died there.

13-14. "This is what will happen to Jehoiakim. He takes advantage of people and makes them work for nothing. He decided to enlarge his palace, put in bigger windows, and decorate it in royal red. When it was finished, did that make him a better king?

15-17. "His father Josiah was a good king. He did what was right. He took the side of the poor and needy. This is what it means to know the Lord and be a great king. But his son is proud. His heart is set on himself. He gets what he wants even if it means killing innocent people. He's taking advantage of the whole country.

18-19. "This is what the Lord says about King Jehoiakim: 'The people will not cry when he dies. No one will say, "How tragic! Our king is dead!" The Babylonians will throw his body outside the city like a dead donkey.'

20-23. "'You need to cry, not rejoice. The nations who have promised to help you will be crushed. When you were rich the Lord told you what was coming, but you would not listen. The winds of war will blow. Your allies will be defeated. You'll be disgraced and put to shame. Now you live in beautiful houses, but the time will come when you will groan in pain.'"

24-27. Later the Lord gave me this message for the next king: "If you were a ring on my finger, I would pull you off. I will turn you over to the Babylonians. They will take you, your mother, and your family to Babylon, and you will die there. You will long for home but will never come back."

28-30. "Why did this happen? Why were the king and thousands of his people taken into exile? O people, pay attention to what the Lord said about your king at that time and learn from it. He ruled the country for only three months, and not one of his sons became the next king."

The Lord Is Our Righteousness

23 Before the king and his family were taken to Babylon, the Lord told me to say this to our leaders: "Woe to you shepherds. This is what the Lord says: 'You have driven My flock away from Me. You did not care for them or visit them. So now I will visit you for what you have done.'

3-4. "'But I will not forget My people. A small group will come back from the countries where they were taken. I will put shepherds over them who

will care for them. My people will no longer be afraid, and no one will mislead them or take them captive.'"

5-6. Then the Lord said, "The time will come when a Descendant of David will be king over Israel. He will be a Branch from David's family and will rule My people wisely. He will do what is just and right. People will be saved and will be at peace. This is the name My people will call Him: The Lord Our Righteousness."

7-8. "The time is coming when My people will no longer say, 'The Lord who brought us out of Egypt,' but they will say, 'The Lord who brought us back from Babylon.' My people will live again in their own land."

False Prophets

9-10. I stand in awe of the Lord and His awesome power. My heart trembles, and my body shakes when He speaks. Woe to the false prophets who prophesy smooth things. The land is full of wickedness. That's why the pastures are dry. But the leaders and the people continue to do evil."

11-14. The Lord says, "The prophets and priests do evil right in My Temple. The time of their punishment is coming. I watched them lead My people astray in the northern kingdom. Now they are doing the same thing in the southern kingdom. By their example they encourage My people to do evil until Jerusalem is like the city of Sodom."

15. "I will give these false prophets a bitter pill to swallow for what they have done to My people."

16-18. Then the Lord gave this message for the people: "Don't listen to what these prophets are telling you. They give you all kinds of false hopes. They keep telling you not to take My teachings seriously, that no harm will come

to you. You don't need to change. Have they ever heard Me say this? Not one of them has ever listened to Me or paid attention to what I've said."

19-20. The storm of the Lord is coming. It will come like a mighty, twisting wind. It will not stop until it has done what it is supposed to do. Then the people will know that what the Lord says is true.

21-22. The Lord said to me, "I didn't send these false prophets to speak for Me. If they had listened to what I said, they would be telling the people to change their ways and turn from their wickedness."

23-27. "I am the God who is far away and yet nearby. I see everything and everyone. No one can hide from Me. I have heard what these prophets have said. They tell the people that they had a dream or a vision from Me when it's not true. How long will they do this? They want My people to love their idols more than Me."

28. "Why don't they tell the people the truth, that it was only an ordinary dream they had? If a true prophet has a dream from Me, he will tell the people what he has seen and heard, no matter how unwelcome it is. Is there not a difference between ordinary dreams and dreams from Me?"

29-32. "My word is like a fire or a hammer. I am against false prophets who use their own words and say they come from Me. I am against those who lead My people astray. I did not send these prophets. They have not helped My people, so I have taken a stand against them."

33-34. Then the Lord said to me, "Jeremiah, when the false prophets ask you what the Lord is concerned about, tell them that I'm concerned about them and what they're telling the people. Tell them that if any one of

them says he had a dream or a vision and claims it was from Me, I will surely punish him for what he did."

35-36. "My people should be asking, 'What has the Lord said?' They should not be listening to these false prophets who have spoken lies instead of God's truth."

37-40. "I want you to confront these prophets and ask them what they're doing to help the people. If they tell you that they're speaking for Me, give them this message: 'Anyone who talks of lasting peace is a false prophet. The Lord will turn against you and against Jerusalem. He will bring disgrace and shame on you that no one will forget.'"

Two Baskets of Fruit

24 After Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, took our king, his family, and officials captive, the Lord gave me a vision and showed me two baskets of figs sitting in front of the Temple. One basket had good figs, and the other had bad figs.

3. Then the Lord said to me, "Jeremiah, what do you see?" I said, "Two baskets of figs, one good and one bad. The good figs are very good, and the bad ones are very bad."

4-7. The Lord said, "Some of My people in Babylon are very good. I will watch over them and bring them back home. I will never uproot them this way again. I will give them one heart for Me. They will be My people, and I will be their God."

8-10. "As for your present king, Zedekiah, he and his officials didn't surrender to the Babylonians, as I told them to. They are the bad figs. People will laugh and make jokes about them. War, hunger, and disease will come on them, until not one of them is left in the land that I gave their ancestors."

Seventy Years of Captivity

25 When Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylon, the Lord gave me this message for His people: "It's been more than twenty years since the Lord called me to be a prophet, and I have never failed to tell you what He said. But you wouldn't listen. Though other prophets said the same thing, you still didn't listen.

5-7. "They too asked you to change your ways. If you had, you would not be taken to another land. They told you to stop worshiping idols and being so wicked. They said if you didn't, the Lord would discipline you. But you didn't listen and went right on doing your thing.

8-10. "Because you didn't listen, this is what the Lord says: 'I will send Nebuchadnezzar down from the north, and he will devastate the land. Shouts of joy and gladness and the happy voices of brides and bridegrooms will stop. The grinding of wheat will also stop, and the late-burning lamps will go out.

11-14. "'You and neighboring nations will be taken by Babylon and will be under her rule for seventy years. But I will destroy her, and she will never be rebuilt. The same destruction that will come on you will come on her. I have told Jeremiah to write all this down. Babylon will fall, and I will repay her for being so cruel to My people.'"

God's Punishment of Nations

15-16. The Lord spoke to me in vision and said, "Take a cup of wine from Me and have the nations around you drink it. When they do, they will stagger and be filled with despair because of the sword of war that I will bring against them."

17-21. So in vision I took the cup and

wrote down the message the Lord gave me. Then I gave a copy to the king and to each foreign ambassador living in Jerusalem. Judah was the first nation on the list to be disciplined. Then came Egypt, Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Ammon.

22-26. After that came Tyre, Arabia, and countries to the north. The Lord said, "What you wrote will also apply to the nations at the end of time and to the ruler of spiritual Babylon.

27-29. "Tell the people of Jerusalem that this is what the Lord says, 'I will make you drink from this same cup. You will stagger and fall and will not be able to get back up because of the war I will bring against you.' If they refuse to listen, tell them not to think it won't happen. The sword of war will come on them and on their neighboring nations.

30-31. "Jeremiah, you must tell the people everything I have told you. Tell them that I will thunder from heaven and roar against My own city. I have a controversy with Satan and with all the nations that follow him. The day is coming when I will judge the world, and the wicked will be put to death forever."

32. Then the Lord gave me another vision, saying, "Look! Disaster is coming! A bad storm with twisting winds is ready to hit. It will come on you and your people. And at the end it will come on the whole world."

33-35. In vision I saw dead people from one end of the earth to the other. No one will be there to bury them. Weep and mourn, you shepherds and leaders of the flock. That day is coming. You will break as easy as a clay jar. You will have no place to run and hide.

36-37. Listen to the cry of the false prophets and leaders. The Lord is destroying their pastures and taking

away their people. Their cities will lie in ruins, and their pastures will turn into a wilderness.

38. The Lord will come on them like a hungry lion. He will come against the people and the land. The sword of war will come because of the Lord's righteous anger against sin.

Jeremiah Arrested

26 When Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, was king of Judah, the Lord had said to me, "Go and stand in the courtyard of the Temple and tell the people everything I have told you. Don't leave anything out. If they listen and repent, I will not punish them.

3-6. "Say to them, 'This is what the Lord says: If you don't listen to My prophets, I will destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, just as I destroyed the city of Shechem and the ancient sanctuary.'"

7-9. Some of the priests and false prophets were also in the Temple that day and heard me say this. As soon as I finished, they grabbed me and said, "You'll die for this! Why did you say that Jerusalem and the Temple will be destroyed?" Then the people turned against me too.

10-11. When the leaders heard this, they quickly came to hold court to judge me. The priests and false prophets said to them, "This man deserves to die because he spoke against Jerusalem and the Temple!" Then they turned to the people and said, "You were there. You heard what he said."

12-15. I defended myself and said, "That message was from the Lord. All you need to do is change your ways, and He will not destroy this city and the Temple. As for me, do with me whatever you think is right. But remember, if you put me to death, you'll

be guilty of killing an innocent man, because what I told you came from the Lord."

16-18. Then the leaders said, "This man doesn't deserve to die. He only told us what the Lord said." One of the elders pressed forward and said, "When Hezekiah was king, the prophet Micah said that Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed.

19. "Did Hezekiah kill him? Didn't he listen and earnestly pray that Jerusalem be saved? And didn't the Lord change His plans and save the city? So let's not put an innocent man to death and bring more troubles on ourselves by refusing to change our ways."

20-23. Now, there was another prophet of the Lord who had said the same thing about the Temple. His name was Uriah. When the king heard what he had said, he wanted to arrest him and have him executed. But Uriah heard about it and fled to Egypt. Then the king sent some men to get him and bring him back, and the king had him killed.

24. But because one of the older officials stood up for me, I was not handed over to the king for execution.

Jeremiah's Harness

27 After Zedekiah became king, the Lord said to me, "Make yourself a little wooden harness and put it around your neck. Then go to the officials who are here from other countries trying to get Judah to join them against Nebuchadnezzar.

4-5. "Give them this message: This is what the God of Israel says: 'Go back and tell your king that I am the one who created heaven and earth. The earth is Mine, so I can give it to anyone I want.

6-7. "I have asked Nebuchadnezzar to do some work for Me. I have given

Judah and all the neighboring countries into his hands. They will serve him, his son, and his grandson until the time comes for his nation to fall. Then his people will serve another nation.

8-9. "I will bring war, disease, and hunger on those countries who refuse to submit to him, until the king of Babylon has conquered them. So don't listen to your self-appointed prophets who say they have had visions of the future. Don't believe those who say they can read the future in the stars.

10-11. "Don't let them tell you that together you'll be able to defeat the king of Babylon. If you fight against him, you will be defeated, and many of your people will be killed. But those nations who submit to him will be saved from destruction, and their people will live in peace."

12-13. I gave our king this message: "Submit to the king of Babylon, and you will live. Why should so many of our people die? Why let war, disease, and hunger come on us and on all these other countries?

14-15. "So don't listen to the officials from other nations and to these false prophets who tell you differently. They're lying; they're surely not speaking for Me. They have appointed themselves as prophets."

16-17. Then I said to the priests and the people: "This is what the Lord says: 'Don't listen to the false prophets who tell you that Nebuchadnezzar will bring back the treasures he took when he attacked Jerusalem before. They're lying; don't listen to them. When the king of Babylon comes against us this time, surrender to him and you'll live.

18-19. "If these men were true prophets, they would at least be praying that the treasures the Babylonians left

behind would not be taken. But the Lord has said that the treasures not taken before will be taken this time, including everything from the Temple.

20-22. "When Nebuchadnezzar came the first time, he took many captives and treasures with him. The second time he took your king with more captives and treasures. This time he will come and take your king and whatever is left. They will stay in Babylon until I call for them."

A False Prophet

28 When Zedekiah was king, Hananiah, a false prophet, challenged me, saying to the priests and people, "The Lord is not telling us to surrender, but within two years He will break the power of Babylon. The Temple treasures will come back, as will our former king and our people. The Lord will break the power of Babylon once and for all."

5-9. Then I said, "I wish that what you're saying were true. It would be great if our treasures came back, including our king and our people. But listen to what the Lord says: 'When the ancient prophets said that war would come because of the wickedness of the people, it came. One way to know a true prophet is if what he says comes true.'"

10-11. Then Hananiah took the little wooden harness from my neck, broke it, and said, "This is what the Lord really says: 'I will break the power of Babylon within the next two years just as easily as this harness.'"

12-14. Sometime later the Lord told me to go to Hananiah and give him this message: "The Lord says, 'You have broken a small wooden harness, but I will replace it with an iron one. I will put it on the neck of My people and all the surrounding nations. I will

give this land into the hands of the king of Babylon and will make them serve him."

15-17. So I went to see Hananiah and gave him the message. I said to him, "Listen to me! The Lord hasn't called you to be a prophet, and you know it. You're not telling the truth. This is what the Lord says: 'This very year you will die, because you're telling people not to believe Me.'" Two months later he was dead.

A Letter to the Captives

29 Then I wrote a letter to the priests, prophets, and leaders who had been taken captive by the king of Babylon before. This included our former king, the queen mother, many officials, and skilled workers. I gave the letter to the two men whom King Zedekiah was sending to Nebuchadnezzar.

4-6. The letter began: "This is what the Lord says to our people in Babylon, 'Plan to be there seventy years. Build houses and plant gardens as you can. Don't feel sorry for yourselves. Let your sons and daughters get married and have children, as you would if you were home.

7-11. "Do what you can for the peace of the country and pray for it. If it prospers, so will you. Don't let your self-appointed prophets tell you differently. They're lying. I have not sent them. When the seventy years are up, I will keep My promise and bring you back home. I have plans for you; I will help you and give you a future and a hope.

12-14. "Then you will call on Me, and I will answer. You will talk to Me, and I will listen. You will seek Me and find Me as you search for Me with all your heart. I will bring you home from wherever you are and give you back all that was yours."

15. I added this note: After you read my letter you will say, "We have prophets with us in Babylon, so why should we listen to you?"

16-18. Listen to what the Lord says about the people in Jerusalem: "I will discipline them by war, disease, and hunger. But they will keep on worshiping their idols. Many of them will be taken to join you in Babylon. Nations will be shocked at what God has done to His own people, and Jerusalem will become an object of cursing.

19-21. "I will let this happen because the people in Jerusalem are not listening to Me, and you're not listening to Me either. I am the one who let you be taken to Babylon. I will let the two false prophets from here who keep sending you letters be taken to Babylon and executed before your eyes.

22-23. "Then when you curse someone, you will say, 'May the Lord do to you what He let happen to the two false prophets who were executed before our eyes.' This will happen because of their lies. They told you things I never said. I saw their wickedness and heard what they were telling you."

24-25. The Lord also told me to write to Shemaiah, who was always undermining what I said. So I wrote to him: "This is what the Lord says: 'You wrote letters to the people and priests back in Jerusalem.

26. "You told Zephaniah the priest that I, the Lord, had put him in charge of the Temple. You also told him that he should have anyone arrested and put in chains who prophesies that the Temple will be destroyed.

27-28. "Then you asked him why he didn't do this to Jeremiah the prophet, since he keeps writing to us in Babylon that Jerusalem will be attacked and destroyed. You said that Jeremiah must

be stopped! He writes and tells us to settle down and plan to be here for seventy years."

29-31. After Zephaniah the priest got this letter from Shemaiah in Babylon and read it to me, the Lord said, "Write another letter to the exiles in Babylon and say to them, 'This is what the Lord says about Shemaiah: I did not send him. He's lying to you.'

32. "I will punish this dreamer. He will not live to see the good things I will do for you when I bring you back home. This is because he has taught you to rebel against Me by not believing what I said."

The Lord's Promise

30 Then the Lord said to me, "Write down everything I said so the people will have it when they come back home. The days are coming when I will free My people from captivity and bring them back to their own land."

4-7. The Lord gave me this message for the people: "I hear cries of terror, not the sounds of joy. Can men have babies? Then why do they have such painful looks on their faces? Because there's another attack coming on Jerusalem. It will be a dreadful day. But I'll be with you, just as I was with Jacob through his time of trouble."

8-9. "The day is coming when I will end your captivity. Foreigners will no longer be able to keep you captive. My people will serve Me, and the Descendant of David will be their king. These promises are for My people to the end of time."

10-11. "So don't be afraid. I will save you and bring you back home. Like Jacob, My people will return to their land in peace, and no one will make them afraid. I will overturn the nations where you live. For now I must discipline you, but I will be fair and just."

12-14. "At present your wounds are beyond healing. There is no one to bind them up, no medicine to help you. No one will plead your case. All your political friends have left you. They no longer care about you. I had to discipline you because of your wickedness. Your guilt is very great."

15-17. "Why are you crying so much? I have not turned against you. I disciplined you because of your sins. The time will come when your enemies will be taken captive. Those who destroyed your land will be destroyed. I will heal your wounds and restore your health. I will care for you and plead your case. You are still My son."

18-20. "I will restore the land to My people. Jerusalem will be rebuilt and so will the king's palace. From people's houses will come songs of thanksgiving and praise. I will add to their number, and they will never decrease. I will restore their honor, and their children will see a renewed nation. I will punish all those who mistreat My people."

21-22. "The true Leader of My people will be one of their own. Their Ruler will come from their own land. I will stay close to Him, and He will come and stand boldly in My presence. I will be your God, and you will be My people."

23-24. But before this, a storm will come on our city. It will come like a whirlwind. The Lord will not change. He will do what He has in mind. Yet in all this trouble you will someday see the loving hand of God."

God's Love

31 The Lord said, "The time is coming when I will be the God of all Israel, and you will be My people. In the past I saved you from the sword of the Egyptians and

drew near to you in a cloud and gave you rest."

3-5. On the way to Canaan the Lord had said, "I love you with an everlasting love. I will be faithful to you. I will draw you close to Me. I will rebuild you as a people. You will dance for joy. You will have your own land and plant your own vineyards. Your harvests will be great, and you will eat the fruit of your own labor."

6. "The voice of your watchmen will echo across the hills as they call out, 'Come to Jerusalem! Come and worship the Lord our God!'"

7. The Lord says, "Sing with gladness for the descendants of Jacob. Shout for joy for the chief among nations. Make your praises heard. Say, 'Lord, rescue Your people and deliver those who are still in Babylon.'"

8-9. "I will reply, 'I will gather My people from the ends of the earth. The blind and the lame will all come home. They will make their way back with tears of joy. Their hearts will be full of praise. I will lead them beside streams of water. They will not stumble and fall. I am their Father, and Israel is My son.'"

10-11. The Lord gave me this message for the nations: "Listen to Me! Proclaim the news everywhere: He who scattered Israel will also gather it. He will watch over His people like a good shepherd. The Lord will save His people."

12-14. "They will come back home and sing for joy. They will rejoice in the goodness of the Lord. Their lives will be like a beautiful garden, and they will sorrow no more. I will turn their crying into gladness, and give them joy instead of pain. I will bless My people, and they will rejoice in My goodness."

God's Mercy

15. Again the Lord spoke to me, saying, "I hear voices near the grave of Rachel,

weeping. It's the sound of mothers crying for their children who have been killed. They refuse to be comforted. They are being taken to Babylon."

16-17. "But stop crying, and wipe away your tears. What you have done for your children will not go unrewarded. I will bring them back from death, from the land of the enemy. There is hope for you in the Lord. Your children will come back home. I, the Lord, have spoken."

18-19. "I have heard the crying of My people. They're saying, 'Lord, You have disciplined us. We were like an untrained calf. Please turn us around, and we'll come back to You. We have learned our lesson and are ashamed of what we have done. We have been so very foolish.'"

20. "Israel, you are My son in whom I delight. Though I point out your sins and discipline you, I am not against you. My heart longs for you. I have great compassion for you."

21-22. "Follow the road signs. Look for the guideposts. They will bring you back to Me and lead you home. Come back to your own cities. Don't refuse to listen to Me. I will do something never heard of before. Israel will be stronger than her enemies. It will be as strange as women protecting men."

23-26. "I will bring you back from captivity. You will return to Judah and say, 'May the Lord bless Jerusalem and the holy place where God is.' My people will live together in peace. I will strengthen the weak and help the weary. They will say, 'We went to sleep tired and woke up refreshed.'"

27-30. "The days are coming when Judah will be full of people. Just as I cared for them when I disciplined them, I will care for them when they come home. They will no longer say, 'Our parents ate sour grapes, and

we have to taste the bitterness.' Instead, each one has to die for his own sins and taste the bitterness of his own doings.

God's Covenant

31-32. "In the days to come I will offer My covenant to Israel again. It will seem like a new one because it will look different from the one I offered their ancestors. They broke My covenant and made their own.

33-34. "This is the covenant: I will put My law in your minds and write it on your hearts. I will be your God, and you will be My people. No one will have to tell his neighbor about Me, for they will all know Me. I will forgive them and remember their sins no more.

35-37. "The One who keeps the sun shining, and lights up the night sky with the moon and stars, is the mighty God of Israel. He spoke to me and said, 'Only if nature stopped serving Me would Israel stop being My people. Only if the universe could be measured, and the very center of the earth explored, would I reject My people.'

38-40. "'The time is coming when Jerusalem will be rebuilt. The valley that was once full of dead bodies will be made clean and will be holy to the Lord. If you accept My covenant and let Me put My law in your minds and write it on your hearts, then you, your city, and your land will never be destroyed again.'"

Jeremiah Buys Property

32 When Zedekiah was king of Judah and Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon, the Lord spoke to me again. By this time the Babylonians had surrounded the city, and I had been arrested and locked up in the palace.

3-5. Zedekiah said to me, "Why do you keep prophesying and telling people that the king of Babylon will take the city, and that I will be captured and taken to Babylon? You say that if I try to escape, I will not succeed, and that if I fight against the Babylonians, I will be defeated." I could tell that the king was angry.

6-8. Then the Lord said to me, "Your cousin Hanamel will come to the palace and ask for permission to see you. He will ask you if you want to buy his property. He wants you to buy it because you're his closest relative." From this I knew that the Lord was behind the offer.

9-11. So I bought the property and signed the papers. Then I gave the sealed and unsealed copies to Baruch, my secretary, in the presence of my cousin, the witnesses, and the palace guards.

12-15. I said to Baruch, loud enough for all who were there to hear, "Take both copies and put them in a clay jar, and seal it tight to keep for a long time. The day will come when houses, properties, fields, and vineyards will be bought and sold again."

16-19. Then I prayed, "O Lord, You made heaven and earth by Your mighty power. Nothing is too hard for You. You have shown Your love to us, but You have also let us reap the results of the sins of our fathers. O Lord, great is Your wisdom and mighty are Your deeds. You see everything people do and reward them as they deserve.

20-22. "Lord, You performed great miracles in Egypt and have done great things since then. You have made a name for Yourself. You brought our ancestors out of Egypt with a strong hand and took them to the land You promised them, a land beautiful and fertile.

23. "But after they settled in the land, they neither listened to You nor kept Your commandments. By doing this they brought all kinds of disasters on themselves.

24-25. "Now the Babylonians are here building ramps against our walls. You said that hunger, disease, and fighting would come to our city, and that the Babylonians would conquer us. Some of those things are already happening. Yet You told me to buy this property, which I have done."

26-31. The Lord answered, "I am the God of all the earth, so listen to Me. I will hand this city over to the Babylonians. They will break down the walls and burn down all the places of idol worship. My people have gone against everything I have told them. From the day this city was built until now, they have turned away from Me.

32-33. "My people have forced Me to take action because of their wickedness and the wickedness of their leaders, priests, and false prophets. They have turned away from Me again and again. They refuse to listen to Me or to learn from their discipline.

34-35. "They brought idols into My Temple and built altars to the god Baal all over the valley. They even sacrificed newborn babies to the god Molech. I would never think of asking them to do such a terrible thing. This was their idea.

36. "This city will fall into the hands of the Babylonians, not because My people are unwilling to fight, but because hunger and disease will weaken them before that.

37-39. "But the time will come when I will bring My people back from all the countries where they have been taken. They will be My people, and I will be their God. I will give all of them one

heart, and they will love Me forever.

40-41. "I will renew My covenant with them. I will never stop loving them, and I will help them to love Me with all their hearts. They will never again turn away from Me. I will rejoice in doing good things for them, and they will live in this land forever.

42-44. "Just as surely as I will let this city be taken because of their sins, so I will bring My people back and give them all that I have promised. Once again properties will be bought and sold, and papers will be signed in the presence of witnesses. I will bring My people home and restore their land. I, the Lord, have spoken."

Israel Restored

33 While I was under guard at the palace, the Lord said to me, "I am the one who created heaven and earth. Ask Me, and I will tell you things that you can't possibly know any other way.

4-5. "The people will tear down the houses and palaces of Jerusalem to build defenses against the Babylonians. But their enemies will break down the walls of the city anyway, and the houses that are left will be filled with the dead bodies of My people. This will happen because of their wickedness.

6-9. "But I will turn all these troubles into blessings and bring health and healing to My people. I will restore their land, and Judah and Israel will be one nation again. I will forgive their wickedness, and Jerusalem will once more be a source of joy. Every nation will hear about this, and will stand in awe at the prosperity of Israel.

10. "People will say that the land of Judah is like a wilderness. No one can live there. But the time will come when the streets of Jerusalem will again be filled with sounds of laughter.

11. "The voices of brides and bridegrooms and the happy sounds of weddings will be heard. My people will bring their offerings to Me and sing, 'Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. His mercy continues forever.' Their hearts will be filled with joy, because I will bless the land, and it will prosper as never before.

12-13. "There will be green pastures for shepherds to take their sheep. From the cities to the hills, from north to south, flocks of sheep will again fill the land.

14-16. "The day will come when I will fulfill all the promises I have made. I will make a righteous Branch spring from the family tree of David. He will rule over Israel and do what is just and right. My people will live in safety, and Jerusalem will be called The City of the Lord Who Is Righteous.

17-18. "The family line of David will never end, because one of his descendants will sit on the throne of Israel forever. There will be no lack of honest priests who will bring Me sacrifices and offerings from the people."

19-21. The Lord continued: "Only if day and night would cease would My covenant with David change to where no one from his family would ever rule Israel. But My covenant will never be broken. A Descendant of David will be king and rule Israel.

22-26. "My people will be as hard to count as the stars in the sky because there will be so many of them. As surely as I made laws to govern the earth and the sky, just as surely will I keep the covenant I made with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will be merciful to My people and will bring them back from captivity."

King Zedekiah

34 While the king of Babylon and troops from other nations were fighting against Jerusalem, the Lord said to me, "Go and see Zedekiah and tell him that this is what the Lord says: 'I am about to give this city into the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar. He will take it and burn it to the ground.

3-5. "You will be captured, and the last thing you will see is his face. He will put your eyes out and take you to Babylon for the rest of your life. The people will mourn for you and say, 'Our king is dead.'"

6-7. So I went to see the king and told him what the Lord had said. By then the Babylonians were already attacking some of the other fortified cities in Judah.

8-11. That's when Zedekiah proclaimed freedom throughout the land, just as he had promised. Everyone was to set his Hebrew slaves free. And that's what the people did, from the highest official on down. But soon they changed their minds and brought their slaves back to work for them again.

12-14. So the Lord asked me to speak to the people and say to them, "I, the Lord, made a covenant with your ancestors when I brought them out of Egypt. I told them that every seventh year is a Sabbath year. That's when you must free any Hebrew slaves who have sold themselves to you to pay their debts. After six years of service you must let them go. But your ancestors didn't listen.

15-16. "For a little while you did what was right and proclaimed liberty for everyone. In that way you carried out the conditions of My covenant. But then you changed your minds and took your slaves back and made them work for you again.

17. "Listen to Me! You're still doing what you want even though you proclaimed liberty throughout the land. So now I will change My mind and let you do your thing. You will die by the sword or from hunger and disease. Other people will look at you in horror.

18-20. "Those who made a covenant with Me by bringing Me sacrifices, but then didn't keep it, will be killed by the Babylonians, just as those animals were. This will include leaders, court officials, priests, and anyone who made this covenant and then broke it. They all will be killed, and their bodies will be left for the wild animals and vultures.

21. "I will give your king and his officials into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Right now his army has taken a break, but it will come back. As soon as you saw that the army was gone, you broke your agreement and made your Hebrew slaves come back.

22. "So I will make the Babylonians come back too. They will take the city and burn it to the ground. They will turn the whole country into a wilderness, and no one will want to live here."

Loyalty

35 Earlier in my ministry the Lord had said to me, "Go to the leader of the Rechabite clan and tell him that you want to meet him and his relatives in one of the vacant rooms in the Temple. When they come, offer them some wine."

5-7. So after they were all there, I offered them some wine, but they refused. They said, "We don't drink wine. Jonadab, our ancestor, told us not to. He also asked us to promise that we would not build houses and settle down and farm, but that we would live in tents to remind us that we're pilgrims looking forward to the new earth.

8-11. "We have kept our promise. We never drink wine, nor do our wives and children, and we don't own houses or farms. We have done what our ancestor asked us to do. When the king of Babylon invaded our country, we decided to move to Jerusalem for protection. That's the only reason we're living in houses."

12-14. Then the Lord said, "Go and tell the leaders of the country and the people that this is what the Lord says: 'Will you never learn to obey? Jonadab asked his children never to drink wine, and to this day they haven't touched it. Why? Because they decided to obey him. I have asked you to obey Me, but you turn the other way.

15-16. "Again and again I have sent My prophets to you. They have urged you to turn from your evil ways and do what's right so you can continue to live in the land. But you don't listen. The Rechabites listened to their father, but you don't listen to Me.

17. "So I will have to discipline you and let your enemies come against Jerusalem. Everything I said will come on you. I have told you this again and again. I have spoken to you through My prophets, but you didn't even respond."

18-19. "Before I spoke to the leaders and the people, I said to the Rechabites, 'This is what the God of Israel says: "You have listened to your ancestor and obeyed him. Therefore your clan will never die out. You will always have descendants who will stand in My presence and serve me."'"

Jeremiah and the Scroll

36 When Jehoiakim was king, the Lord had said to me, "Take a scroll and write down everything I've told you about Judah and the surrounding nations.

Hopefully, when the people hear what I've said and disaster comes, they'll turn from their wicked ways and come to Me so I can forgive them."

4. So I called Baruch, my secretary, and asked him to write down everything I would dictate to him that the Lord had told me.

5-8. Then I said to him, "The priests no longer let me go to the Temple. But at the next big meeting, I want you to go and read to the people what you have written down. Hopefully, they'll listen and turn from their wickedness." So Baruch agreed to do it.

9-10. Sometime later there was a national feast. People came to Jerusalem from everywhere to fast and pray. That's when Baruch went to the Temple, stood in the courtyard, and read what the Lord had said.

11-15. When one of the king's servants heard what Baruch read from the scroll, he rushed to the palace and found the king's top officials in a meeting. He told them what Baruch had read in the Temple courtyard. So the officials sent for Baruch and had him read it to them.

16-19. When they heard what he read, they said, "Did Jeremiah ask you to write all this down?" Baruch answered, "Yes, every last word of it." They replied, "You and Jeremiah had better go and hide, and don't let anyone know where you are."

The King Burns the Scroll

20-21. Then they went to see the king and told him everything that had happened. The king asked someone to go and get the scroll. The king's secretary went and got it and read it to the king.

22-23. This happened in the winter while there was a fire in the fireplace. After the king's secretary read a little, the king stopped him and reached

over and cut that part from the scroll and threw it into the fire. He kept listening and doing this until the whole scroll was gone.

24-26. The king and his officials were not afraid of what they had done. Some had begged the king not to do it, but he wouldn't listen. Then he ordered Baruch and me arrested. But the Lord made sure the king's officers couldn't find us.

Jeremiah Rewrites the Scroll

27-29. After the king had burned the scroll, the Lord said to me, "Take another scroll and write down everything I told you before. Along with it, send this message to the king from Me: 'You have burned My scroll because you were upset with what I said. You didn't like it when I told you that the king of Babylon would come and destroy the whole country, including Jerusalem.'

30-31. "No one from your family will rule this country again. You will die at the hands of your enemies, and your body will be exposed to the sun by day and the frost by night. I will punish you and your officials for your wickedness. Disaster will come to Jerusalem because you and the people paid no attention to what I said."

32. I did what the Lord said. Then I took another scroll, gave it to Baruch, and dictated everything I had him write before. Only this time I added many more words.

A False Hope

37 When the Babylonians took Jerusalem before, King Jehoiakim had submitted to them. A few years later he rebelled, and the king of Babylon came back and Jehoiakim was killed. So his son took over. Later he was taken to Babylon, and Zedekiah became king. But he and

his officials didn't learn from the past, nor did they listen to the Lord.

3-5. Now the Babylonians came to take the city a third time. So Zedekiah asked me to pray for our country. This was before I was arrested. When the Babylonians heard that the Egyptian army was coming to help us, they went to fight them first.

6-8. The Lord said to me, "I want you to give King Zedekiah this message: 'The Egyptians will be defeated and will go back home. Then the Babylonians will come back and attack Jerusalem. They will be angry because you broke the peace treaty you made with them by asking the Egyptians to come and help you. So the Babylonians will take this city and burn it down.'

9-10. "Don't deceive yourselves into thinking that the Babylonians won't come back. And don't think that even if they do, they'll be so weak from fighting the Egyptians that you can easily defeat them. Even if they were weak, I would help them take this city."

Jeremiah Arrested

11-16. After the Babylonians left to fight the Egyptians, I decided to leave Jerusalem to go back home. But when I got to the city gate, the captain of the guard accused me of going over to the Babylonians. I told him that I was just going home. He didn't believe me, and took me to the city officials. They had me whipped and put into a dungeon.

17. After a long time the king sent for me. He talked to me privately and asked, "Is there any other word from the Lord?" I answered, "No, the Babylonians will come back, take the city, and set it on fire. You'll be captured and taken to Nebuchadnezzar."

18-20. Then I asked, "What crime have I committed that one of your officers

should put me in his private dungeon? Where are the false prophets who told you that the king of Babylon would never invade our country and attack Jerusalem? Are they hiding? Your Majesty, please don't send me back to that dungeon, or I'll die."

21. So the king put me under guard in the palace. Each day I was given a small loaf of bread, until all the bread in the city was gone.

Jeremiah Thrown Into a Well

38 I was arrested because I had told the people that whoever stayed in the city would be killed or die from hunger and disease, but those who surrendered to the Babylonians would live. I also had told them that the Lord said Jerusalem would be taken.

4. When the city officials learned what I had told the people, they went and asked the king to have me put to death. They said I was discouraging the troops by my prophecies, and also by my example of trying to escape the city.
5-6. The king said, "Do with him what you want. I can't stop you." So they took me from the palace and lowered me by ropes into the well that was in the courtyard. There was no water in it, but the bottom was full of mud, and I sank right into it.

7-9. When one of the king's chief servants from Ethiopia heard about this, he went and said to the king, "What the officials did to Jeremiah is wrong. Only they know where he is. And once all the bread in the city is gone, they'll leave him there to die."

10-13. The king said, "Take three men and go and pull him out." So the Ethiopian got three men and some rags, which they made into a rope. Then he called to me and said, "Jeremiah, take this rope, put it under your arms, and

we'll pull you up." I did what they said, and they pulled me up and put me into one of the guardrooms.

The King Asks for Jeremiah

14-16. A little later the king asked to see me. He took me to one side and said, "Tell me the truth, and don't hide anything from me." I replied, "If I tell you the truth, you won't listen to me, and you'll put me back in the well." Then the king took an oath and said, "I swear I will not kill you or turn you over to the city officials."

17-18. So I said to him, "This is what the Lord says: 'If you surrender, your life will be spared and so will Jerusalem, and your wife and family will be safe. But if you don't, the city will be taken and burned to the ground, and you will not escape.'"

19. The king said, "I'm not afraid of the Babylonians, but of my own people who have gone over to them. If they get hold of me, they'll abuse me for sure."

20-22. I said, "The Babylonians will not hand you over to them. So listen to the Lord, and do what He says. He'll be with you, and your life will be spared. The Lord has shown me what will happen if you don't surrender. All the women of the palace will be handed over to Nebuchadnezzar. As they leave, they'll make fun of you and how your friends misled you."

23. "Also your wives and children will be taken. If you try to escape, the Babylonians will catch you and take you to Babylon. Then they'll burn this city to the ground."

24-25. The king listened and then said, "Don't tell anyone what we talked about, or I'll have you killed. When my officials hear that you were here, they'll threaten to kill you if you don't tell them what we said."

26. "If that happens, tell them only part of what we said, that you begged me not to put you back in the well." Then the king called the guards and had them take me back to jail in the guardroom.

27-28. As soon as the officials heard that I had been with the king, they questioned me. I told them only part of our conversation, as the king told me to. So there was nothing they could do, because they didn't hear what we had said. So I was kept in the guardhouse jail until Jerusalem fell.

The Fall of Jerusalem

39 Zedekiah was still king when the Babylonians surrounded the city. For more than two years no food could get in or out. Then they broke down a section of the wall and attacked. The troops streamed into the city, followed by Babylonian officials.

4. When King Zedekiah saw that the wall was giving way, he and his guards decided to escape. They left at night through the royal gardens and headed for the Jordan Valley.

5-7. But the Babylonians went after them and captured them. They took Zedekiah to see King Nebuchadnezzar, who was camped with some of his troops not too far away. He ordered Zedekiah to watch as his sons and officials were executed. Then the king had Zedekiah's eyes put out, put him in chains, and had him taken to Babylon.

8-10. Next he ordered his men to break down the rest of the city wall and set the officials' houses on fire, starting with the royal palace. He put his general in charge and left for Babylon with those who had surrendered and those he had personally picked. Only the very poor were left, and some scraggly vineyards and fields here and there.

11-14. Nebuchadnezzar said to his general, "Find Jeremiah, and don't let anyone hurt him, then do for him whatever he asks." When they found me in the palace jail, they let me go. They also asked the appointed governor to see that I got home safely, which is what I had planned to do.

15-16. While I had been in the palace jail, the Lord had said to me, "Ask for the Ethiopian who got you out of the well, and give him this message for Me: 'The Lord is about to turn this city over to the Babylonians because of its great wickedness.

17-18. "'But you will not be handed over to them. I will watch over you and protect you. You will not be killed or captured, but will be able to escape, because you have put your trust in Me.' The Lord has spoken."

The Governor

40 The Lord used King Nebuchadnezzar to set me free and let me go home. But after that, his general was surprised to find me in chains among the captives going to Babylon. He said, "Your God decided that your land should be destroyed. This happened because your people sinned and didn't listen to Him. **4-6.** "But you shouldn't be in those chains. If you want to come with us, we'll take care of you. But if not, you may stay in your own country. If you want to live with the governor that Nebuchadnezzar appointed, you can, because we told him to take care of you." So that's what I did.

7-10. Some of our officers had fled from the Babylonian army. When they heard that Nebuchadnezzar had left and appointed Gedaliah as governor, they took their men and went to Mizpah to see him. The governor welcomed them and said, "You don't

have to be afraid of the Babylonians anymore. Put away your weapons and go back home to live in peace."

11-12. When our people who had fled to the country of Ammon heard that the king of Babylon had left, they came back to meet the new governor and to help with the harvest.

13-14. Then Johanan and the other officers went to the governor and said, "We've heard that the king of Ammon hired some of our people who live there to come back home and kill you. So we decided to stay here to make sure nothing happens to you." But the governor didn't believe them.

15. Johanan talked to the governor privately and said, "Ishmael, who's now in Ammon, is the one who is supposed to come and kill you. Why don't you let us kill him first? If he succeeds, all the people who are helping you will scatter, and then what will happen to our country?"

16. Gedaliah answered, "Don't do that. It will bring on more fighting and bloodshed. Besides, I don't believe that about Ishmael."

The Governor Is Killed

41 Sometime later Ishmael, who was related to the royal family, came with ten men to see the new governor. Gedaliah welcomed them and asked them to stay and eat with him.

2-3. As they were eating, the men pulled out their swords and killed Gedaliah because he had obeyed Nebuchadnezzar. They also killed all the people who were helping Gedaliah, and a few Babylonian soldiers who happened to stop by.

4-5. Early the next morning eighty men stopped at Mizpah with shaven beards, torn clothes, and cuts on their bodies. They were on their way

to Jerusalem to mourn the destruction of the Temple.

6-7. As soon as Ishmael heard about it, he went to meet them and said, "Please come and see what happened to our governor." Once they were inside the city and the gates were closed, he and his men killed seventy of them and threw their bodies in a nearby well.

8. Ten of the men begged Ishmael not to kill them and offered him the food they had hidden in the field. He accepted their offer and let them live.

9-10. The well was almost filled with the bodies of the seventy men who had been killed. Then Ishmael got the food and took the rest of the people in Mizpah captive, including the king's two daughters and me. He took us and those who had decided to join him and headed for the border of Ammon.

11-12. As soon as Johanan and his men heard what Ishmael had done, and that he and his men were heading for the border, they came after them.

13-15. When we saw Johanan coming, we were overjoyed and ran to meet him. During the fight Ishmael and eight men escaped and crossed the border into Ammon.

16-18. Then Johanan took charge of us, but instead of going back to Mizpah, he decided to go to Egypt. He and his men were afraid that Ishmael would blame them for killing the governor and the Babylonian soldiers, and that Nebuchadnezzar would believe him.

The Flight to Egypt

42 Johanan and his officers came to me and said, "Pray that the Lord will go with us and protect us. Ask Him to show us where we should go and what we should do." I said, "I'll be glad to, and whatever He says I'll tell you." They

answered, "Whether it pleases us or not, we will obey Him. We know that if we listen and obey, all will go well."

7-12. Ten days later the Lord gave me this message for Johanan and his men: "This is what the Lord says: 'If you stay here, I will help you and bless you. What I let happen to Jerusalem and My people was very painful for Me to do. But you don't have to be afraid anymore. I will cause the king of Babylon to have compassion on you and let you go back to your families and farms.

13-18. "'But if you disobey and go to Egypt, you'll have all kinds of troubles. The sword of war will come there, too, as well as hunger and disease, and not one of you will survive. What happened to My people here will happen to you there. The Egyptians will use your name as a curse word, and you'll never see your homeland again.'"

19-22. Then I said to the people, "Listen to the Lord. Don't go to Egypt. If you go, it will be a big mistake. You promised to obey God and do whatever He said, but you're determined to go anyway. It's certain that if you go, you'll be killed or die from hunger and disease wherever you settle."

Jeremiah Forced to Go Along

43 After I told them what the Lord had said, Johanan and his officers said, "You're lying. The Lord didn't tell you that we shouldn't go to Egypt. Your secretary, Baruch, has influenced you against us so that you can turn us over to the Babylonians."

4-7. Johanan and his people would not listen. He decided to go to Egypt and take all of us with him, including Baruch and me, and the king's two daughters, whom the Babylonian gen-

eral had left in the care of the governor. He took us to Egypt, and we settled in one of their cities.

8-10. After we got there, the Lord said to me, "Take a couple of stones and bury them in the brick pavement going up to the Egyptian king's eastern palace. Make sure that some of your people see you do this. Then say to them, 'This is what the Lord says: I will send for Nebuchadnezzar, and he will come and walk on these stones and pitch his tent here.'

11-13. "He will defeat the Egyptians, and some of you will be killed in the war, and others will be taken captive. He will set the Egyptian temples on fire and carry away their gods as trophies. He will pick up Egypt and sling it over his shoulders, as a shepherd does his blanket. Then he will destroy the temple of the sun and leave for home."

A Message for the People

44 A few years later the Lord gave me this message for the Hebrews living in Egypt: "The Lord says, 'All of you saw what happened to Jerusalem because of its wickedness. I sent My prophets to tell the people again and again not to offer sacrifices to idols. But they wouldn't listen and refused to change.

6-7. "So I decided to discipline them by letting war and disaster come to their cities. Why would you want to bring the same things on yourselves? Not a man, woman, or child will survive.

8-10. "Do you want to destroy yourselves? Why are you worshiping the gods of Egypt? Have you forgotten the wickedness of Jerusalem? You know all this, and yet you still don't listen to Me.

11-14. "Therefore, I have no choice but to punish you, as I did Jerusalem. You will be killed by the sword or die

from hunger and disease. Just because you live in Egypt does not mean that you escaped My discipline or the hardships back home. Not one of you will see your country again, except for the few who escape."

15-17. Then the men whose wives were burning incense to the gods of Egypt, and others who were visiting us, said to me, "We're not going to listen to you, because you're not telling the truth. Back home we worshiped other gods, including the queen of heaven, and had plenty to eat and lived in peace.

18-19. "But ever since we stopped offering sacrifices to her, our people have had nothing but trouble. Many were killed or died from hunger and disease." Then the wives spoke up and said, "When we baked cakes for the queen of heaven and brought offerings to her, our husbands knew it and never told us to stop."

20-23. I replied, "Don't you think the Lord knew what you were doing back home? It was His blessings that prospered the country, not those of the queen of heaven. You sinned against the Lord and refused to listen to Him. He could no longer sit by and do nothing. That's why all this has happened to us, and why Jerusalem is in ruins."

24-25. Then I spoke to all the people and said, "Listen to me! This is what the Lord says: 'You promised this goddess that you would continue worshiping her. And you've kept your promise. Very well, keep on worshiping an idol that can't even hear you.

26-28. "But listen to Me. Not one of you living in Egypt who have used My name to make promises to an idol will survive. You will not prosper. You will either be killed by war or die of hunger and disease. I will let those few who want to return home escape.

Then you'll know whose words are true, Mine or yours.

29-30. "'This will be a sign for you to know that what I have said will happen. The king of Babylon will invade this country. And I will give the king of Egypt into his hands, as I did your king back home.'"

God's Promise to Baruch

45 Some years back my secretary, Baruch, wrote down everything I had told him and read it to the king. That's when the Lord told me to give Baruch this message: "After you saw the king cut up the scroll and throw it into the fire, you became discouraged. You said, 'I give up. I'm so worn out by all these troubles, I can't even sleep.'

4-5. "I will tear down what I have built up. I will do this to Jerusalem, and one day to the whole world. Are you looking for special treatment for yourself because you serve Me? Don't. Troubles will come on the whole country. But wherever you go, I will be with you. You will not be killed, but will escape unharmed."

Egypt Defeated

46 Years ago the Lord gave me messages about many countries, including Egypt, which was invaded and then defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

3-4. In vision I saw the Egyptian officers shout to their men, "Get ready for battle! Harness your horses! Sharpen your swords! Put on your helmets! Take your positions!"

5-6. But wait! Why are they so terrified? Why are they turning back? They're running as fast as they can! They've been defeated! They can't escape. By the river Euphrates they stumble and fall.

7-9. What nation is like the Nile River, which rises and floods the land? It is Egypt. It says, "My troops will surge forward like the waves of the sea. We will conquer many nations and take fortified cities. Our chariots will roll on and on. Troops from other nations will join us. Nothing can stop us."

10-12. The Lord says, "I will punish Egypt for her pride. Her armies will be defeated beside the river Euphrates. The sword will devour her troops. Nothing will stop the pain of defeat. Nations will hear her cry of anguish. Her warriors will run and stumble, and whoever falls will be killed."

13-15. The next message the Lord gave me was about what Babylon would do to Egypt. He said, "Announce this throughout their land: 'Take your stations! Get ready! The battle is coming against you!' Her best troops will not stand. They will be swept away. The God of Israel is against you."

16-17. "Your troops will say, 'Hurry! Let's get out of here! Let's get away from the battle and sword!' Other nations will see this and say, 'Egypt is nothing more than a loud noise. The king missed his chance of becoming great by not defeating Babylon.'

18-19. "The Lord is king. There is no other God. As Mount Carmel stands high above the sea, so will Babylon stand over Egypt. Your cities will be taken and destroyed."

20-24. "Egypt is like a young calf ready to run when attacked by a stinging fly. Her troops will run when stung by war. Egypt will hiss like a fleeing snake. Armies from the north will come at her with spears and axes. They will cut down her forests and her troops. Egypt will be put to shame."

25-26. "I will defeat Egypt with her gods and king. I will hand all of them over to the king of Babylon. But later

Egypt will prosper again. I, the Lord, have spoken."

27-28. Then the Lord gave me this message for Israel: "Don't be afraid. I will rescue you from other nations and bring you back to your land. Your exile will end. Once again there will be peace in Israel. So don't be afraid; I will come and save you. But I will have to be fair and discipline you because of your sins."

The People of Philistia

47 The Lord also gave me a message for the people of Philistia. This was before the king of Egypt attacked them after his defeat by the Babylonians.

2-3. The Lord said, "Look! Waters are rising in the north! They're flooding the land! Your people will cry for help. They will hear the sound of chariots and horses. Mothers will stand helpless, unable to save their children."

4-7. "The time has come for Philistia to be disciplined. All who come to defend the cities of Tyre and Sidon will be cut off. I will destroy Philistia. The people will shave their heads in mourning. They will cry out, 'O sword of the Lord, stop!' But how can it stop when I have ordered it to attack?"

The Country of Moab

48 Then the Lord gave me this message for the little country of Moab: "Pity the people of Moab. Soon the glory of their kingdom will be gone. Men are plotting her downfall. They say, 'Come, let's put an end to that country.' The sword will come, and her cities will be destroyed."

3-9. "Listen to the cries of Moab, to the sobs of children. Her people are fleeing and weeping as they go. They're shouting, 'Quick! Run for your lives!' Moab trusted in her

riches. But her idol god will be taken to Babylon, and so will her priests. The green valleys and vineyards will be gone. Give the people wings so they can fly away."

10-13. "Cursed is the man who refused to attack Moab. She has lived secure from her youth. She has been undisturbed. She has not been touched by war, nor have her people been taken away. But the days are coming when blood will flow in the streets. She will lose confidence in her god, just as Israel lost confidence in her gods."

14-15. "Men of Moab, why do you keep telling yourselves how brave you are? Your land will be invaded, and your cities will be destroyed. Your strongest warriors will fall. I am the Lord of all nations."

16-18. "The fall of Moab is near. Her ruin is coming. Those of you who live nearby, mourn for her. Say to yourselves, 'Her power has been broken. Her glory and might are gone.' The destroyer is coming and will destroy her cities."

19-20. "Come, stand by the side of the road. Ask the people who are fleeing what happened. They will say, 'Moab has fallen! Weep for her! Our country has been disgraced. Our nation is destroyed.'"

21-27. "Judgment will come on the cities of Moab. Her strength will be broken. She will stagger like someone drunk and will become the laughing-stock of nations. Moab laughed at Israel and looked down on My people as if they were caught with a gang of thieves. She celebrated their defeat and rejoiced at their suffering."

28-33. "Moab will be destroyed, and her people will suffer. Let them leave their cities and flee to the mountains. Moab is arrogant and proud. I have

listened to their boasting. I weep over Moab. My heart aches over the men who will die in battle. I weep over her vineyards and fields. Gladness will be gone, and no one will shout for joy.

34-36. "The people of Moab will cry out in pain. Their rivers will dry up, and their trees and vineyards will die. I will put an end to their idol worship and sacrifices to their gods. My heart aches for the people; they will lose everything. The beauty and wealth of Moab will be gone.

37-39. "Everyone will shave their heads in grief. They will put on clothes of mourning and weep. I will break the power of Moab as I would an old clay jar. People will say, 'Moab has fallen! Her power has been shattered! Her beauty has been shamed!' Moab will be ridiculed; other nations will laugh at her.

40-44. "A nation will sweep down on her like an eagle with outstretched wings. Her cities will be captured and her strongholds taken. I have set a time for her destruction. Whoever escapes will fall into a pit, and whoever climbs out will be caught. The time for Moab's punishment has come.

45-46. "People will flee to the city, but will find it in flames. Fires will rage in the mountains. Her pride and boasting will be gone. Her sons and daughters will be captured and taken away.

47. "But I will restore the land of Moab, and she will prosper again." This is the message that the Lord gave me for the country of Moab.

The Country of Ammon

49 Then the Lord gave me a message for the little country of Ammon. He said, "Why didn't Israel fight when Ammon took some of her land? The time is coming when I will sound the battle

cry against her. She will hear the sound of war, and her cities will be set on fire. Her country will be in ruins. And I will give Israel back her land.

3-5. "Cry for the cities of Ammon. Put on clothes of mourning and weep. Her god will be taken into exile, and so will her priests. Why do the people of Ammon boast so much? They have trusted in their riches. They say, 'Who dares to attack us?' I will bring terror to Ammon from all sides. Her people will run for their lives.

6. "But the time will come when I will bless Ammon, and she will prosper again. I, the Lord, have spoken."

The Country of Edom

7-8. Then the Lord spoke to me again and gave me a message for the country of Edom. He said, "Has Edom lost her mind? Has she lost her judgment? Where are her wise men and counselors? Disaster is coming on Edom. The time has come for Me to punish her for her wickedness.

9-11. "After a harvest of grapes, aren't a few overlooked and left? If thieves break into a house, don't they take what they want and leave the rest? But I will take everything from Edom. I will uncover her hiding places. Neighboring nations will perish, and Edom too will be no more. But I will watch over her widows and orphans.

12-13. "If innocent people suffer, should the guilty go free? I have promised Myself that I will discipline Edom for her wickedness. She will become an object of ridicule. All her cities will be destroyed. I have spoken."

14-16. In vision I saw the Lord send an angel to the nations to assemble them for battle against Edom. He will make her a weak and despised nation. Her pride has deceived her. No one fears her anymore. Even though she makes

her nest high in the mountains, the Lord will bring her down.

17-19. The Lord says, "Everyone who goes past Edom will be horrified at what they see. Just as Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, so will the cities of Edom. No one will live in them again. The people of Edom will be taken away, and I will appoint a ruler over those who are left. Who can stop Me from doing this?"

20-22. Listen to what the Lord has in mind for the country of Edom. Her people will be horrified at what takes place. When she falls, it will surprise the countries around her. A nation will attack her the same way that an eagle swoops down to catch its prey, and her warriors won't have a chance.

The Country of Syria

23-25. Next the Lord gave me a message for the country of Syria. The Lord said, "The people in your cities are worried; fear grips their hearts. The city of Damascus has become weak, and her people have fled. Why is she forsaken? Where is her joy?"

26-27. "The Babylonians will come against her. Her young men will be killed; her warriors will be cut off. Her walls will be broken down, and the palaces of her king will be set on fire."

The Desert People

28-30. The Lord gave me a message for the desert people also. He said, "The king of Babylon will come and attack you. He will take your tents and flocks and carry them off. He will take your camels and all your goods. There will be terror in your camps. Run for your lives! Hide in the caves!"

31-33. "Nebuchadnezzar will take everything you have. Disaster will come on you from every side. Your

villages will be empty. No one will live there again."

The Country of Elam

34-36. The Lord also gave me a message for the little country of Elam. He said, "I will break the power of Elam. Her men will be chased and killed in battle. The winds of war will blow, and her people will scatter."

37-38. "She will be afraid of her enemies, terrified of those who are against her. The sword will pursue her people. Many will be killed, including her king and officials."

39. "Yet in the days ahead I will restore her people, and once again she will prosper. I, the Lord, have spoken."

A Prophecy Against Babylon

50 After this the Lord gave me a message for Babylon. He said, "Tell the news to everyone! Proclaim it everywhere! Tell them that Babylon will fall. Her gods will be destroyed. A nation from the north will come and attack her. Men and animals will flee away, and no one will live there again."

4-5. "The time will come when the people of Israel and Judah will seek the Lord together. They will ask to go back home. They will accept the conditions of My covenant and will fulfill the plan I have for them."

6-7. "My people are like lost sheep. They have wandered from mountain to mountain. Whoever has seen them has attacked them and said, 'They have sinned against their God. So we are not guilty if we kill them.'"

8. "But the time is coming when My people will leave Babylon. When it comes, be ready to pack up and leave for home."

9-10. "I will bring nations against Babylon. They will line up in battle,

and she will be taken. She will be looted, and those who conquer her will take whatever they want.

11-13. "Babylon, you have plundered other nations. You have acted like a young stallion full of life. But your city will be destroyed, and you will be humbled. You will become the least of nations, and will eventually disappear. Because of your pride, you will no longer be inhabited. You will sit in ruins. Those who go by will be shocked at what they see.

14-16. "All nearby nations, prepare to attack Babylon. She has sinned against the Lord. Attack her from all sides; she will surrender. Her towers of defense will fall; her walls will be broken down. Give to Babylon what she has given to others. Let every foreigner living in Babylon go free; let them return to their own country.

17-18. "My people are among the captives. They have been like sheep chased by lions. Assyria attacked Israel; then Babylon attacked Judah. I will punish Babylon, just as I punished Assyria.

19-20. "I will bring My sheep back home and feed them in green pastures. The guilt of Israel and Judah will be gone. I will forgive My people because they will turn to Me with all their hearts and will keep My covenant.

21-23. "Come, attack Babylon. Do all I asked you to do. The sound of battle is in the land. Babylon has hammered the world around her, but her hammer will be broken. She will be defeated, and the nations will be shocked.

24-27. "I will set a trap for you, O Babylon, and you will be taken because you have fought against Me. I have taken My weapons and gone to Babylon because I have a work to do. Attack her from all sides, take her treasures, destroy everything. Slaughter her troops;

have no mercy. Her probation is closed; Babylon is doomed.

28. "Listen to the refugees who have come back home. Listen to their stories of how the Lord has punished Babylon for her pride and for destroying His Temple.

29-30. "Call the troops; surround the city. Let no one escape. Pay her back for what she has done against the Lord. Her young men will be killed, and her powerful armies will be destroyed.

31-32. "Babylon, you are filled with pride. Therefore, I am against you. Your time has come. The land of pride will fall, and no one will help her. I will set your cities on fire, and everything in them will be destroyed.

33-34. "My people are oppressed. Their captors hold them fast and refuse to let them go. But their Redeemer is strong. The time has come for them to be free. I will rescue them; I will defend their cause; I will bring them back home.

35-36. "But there will be no rest for the people of Babylon. The sword will come against them, against her wise men and rulers, against her false prophets. What fools they have been!

37-38. "The sword will destroy her armies and all those who helped her. It will destroy her treasures and take them away. The river Euphrates will dry up, and the enemy will come in. Babylon is a land full of idols, and her people have lost their common sense because of it.

39-40. "Babylon will become an empty city full of ruins. Jackals and owls will make their homes there. The same thing that happened to Sodom and Gomorrah will happen to Babylon. No one will live there again.

41-42. "Look! An army is coming from the north, from a great nation. Their troops are preparing for war. They are

cruel and show no mercy. Their horses and chariots sound like the waves of a roaring ocean. They're coming, ready to attack.

43. "The king of Babylon has heard the news. His hands go limp, and his knees shake. He is gripped with fear.

44. "I will come on Babylon like a lion. People will run from the city as sheep run from their attacker. I will set a ruler over Babylon of My own choosing, and who can stop Me?

45-46. "Listen to what I have planned against Babylon. Her people will be taken away, and her pastures and farms will be destroyed. People will be shocked at what has happened to her. At the news of Babylon's capture, the nations will tremble. Everywhere the cry of her fall will be heard."

The Destruction of Babylon

51 The Lord also said, "I will bring a destroying wind against Babylon. Armies will come and destroy her as easily as wind blows away the dust of the harvest. The city will be attacked and taken so quickly that it will catch her troops by surprise. Elsewhere her armies will try to defend the country, but they will be totally destroyed.

5-8. "But I have not forgotten My people, though they have sinned against Me. Flee from Babylon; her judgment has come. The nations drank of her wine, and now they have come in revenge to destroy her. Babylon will fall, and no medicine will relieve her pain.

9-10. "The captives will say, 'We tried to help her, but she wouldn't listen. Now it's too late. Let's leave and go home. The Lord has saved us. Let's tell the people what the Lord has done.'

11-14. "I will bring the Medes and Persians against her. They will shout to their men: 'Sharpen your weapons!

Take up your shields!' They will punish Babylon for Me because of what she did to My Temple. Her time as a nation is up. The Medes and Persians will attack and will raise their flag over Babylon. They will shout over her in triumph."

15-19. The Lord created this world. He stretched out the sky by His wisdom. At His command lightning flashes, thunders roar, and rain comes. Men know so little that they turn to lifeless idols for help. But they can't help them. The Lord is the living God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the one who chose Israel.

20-26. The Lord says, "Babylon, you were My weapon against nations. But you were ruthless. You killed old men and children, shepherds and farmers, animals and plants. I will punish you for what you have done. You have been like a burning volcano spewing lava everywhere. But I will turn you into a burned-out mountain. No one will want to take a stone from you.

27-30. "Blow the trumpet. Let the enemy come against Babylon like a swarm of locusts. Let the Medes and Persians come against her. The Lord has decided to turn Babylon into an empty city. Her strength is gone. She trembles like a little girl at the sight of warriors. Her gates are broken down; her houses are being burned.

31-33. "The king has been told that the enemy is coming into the city from every side and that the battle is lost. The river has been crossed and the fortresses set on fire. His troops have lost their courage. They are being mowed down like a harvest of grain.

34-35. "When Nebuchadnezzar was king, he ate up Jerusalem. He turned the city upside down. Like a huge snake, he swallowed her. The people who were left said, 'May what he did

to us be turned on Babylon. May she be held responsible for her unnecessary cruelty.'

36-37. "I, the Lord, will take up the cause of My people and will give Babylon a taste of what she has done. She will be nothing but a heap of ruins, an object of horror, and no one will live there again.

38-40. "Babylon roars like a lion, and her people growl like baby lions. I will make them drunk, and when they're happy and half asleep, her enemies will come and take the city. They will be killed like lambs to be sacrificed.

41-44. "The city that everyone admired will be taken and will become a place of horror. Her enemies will come against her like the waves of the sea, and she will become as dry as a desert. I will punish the god of Babylon and make him give up the things he stole from My Temple. The walls will fall, and the city will be taken.

45-46. "Come out of her, My people. Come and save yourselves. Run from what is coming on Babylon; don't be afraid. You will hear lots of rumors, but they come and go. One rumor will be about fighting coming this year, and one about it coming next year.

47-49. "But the time will come when I will punish Babylon and her gods. Her people will be killed, and their bodies will lie in the streets. Her enemies will come against her, and she will fall. She will fall because of her pride and cruelty.

50-51. "Those of you who have escaped the sword, don't stand there! Run for home! Hold on to My promise, and think about a renewed Jerusalem. You say, 'But we have been shamed. Our nation has been destroyed; we feel forsaken. Enemies have entered the Temple, even the Most Holy Place, and taken her treasures.'

52-56. "The time is coming when I will destroy Babylon, and her people will groan over what happens to their glorious city. Even if she had walls reaching to the sky, she would still fall. Listen to the sound of weeping coming from Babylon! Waves of enemy troops will come against her. Her army will be destroyed, and her troops killed. I am the God of justice. I will not let pride and sin go on forever. **57-58.** "Her rulers and officials will get drunk, and while they're celebrating, the enemy will come, and in one night they'll all be killed. Her walls will be broken, and the city will be set on fire. Everything she did to protect herself will go up in flames."

Jeremiah Speaks

59-60. These are the messages I received from the Lord and wrote down before Jerusalem fell. I gave them to one of the officials who was going with King Zedekiah to Babylon to see Nebuchadnezzar. I made a copy for myself.

61-62. I said to the king's official, "When you get to Babylon be sure you read this message to our people there. After you're done, pray this prayer: 'Lord, we believe what You have said. You will destroy this city, and it will be desolate forever. Amen.'

63-64. "Then roll up the scroll, tie a stone to it, and throw it in the Euphrates River. Say, 'This is the way Babylon will sink and be gone. She will never rise again.'" This was the last of the prophecies against various nations that the Lord gave me, and which I wrote down.

Jeremiah Looks Back

52 This last chapter is about King Zedekiah and the last days of Jerusalem. He was

twenty-one years old when he became king, and he ruled for eleven years. He was disobedient, just as the king before him was. The Lord was displeased with Jerusalem because of what he and his people did. After many warnings He let the people of Jerusalem be taken into captivity.

4-7. Two years before this, Zedekiah had broken his agreement with Nebuchadnezzar. So the king came and surrounded the city. The siege lasted more than two and a half years, until there was nothing to eat. Then the Babylonians broke through the wall. During the night Zedekiah and his men escaped and headed for the Jordan Valley.

8-11. But the Babylonians caught up with them near the city of Jericho. They took Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar, who made him watch as his sons and officials were put to death. Then he had Zedekiah's eyes put out and took him in chains to Babylon, where he was kept in prison until he died.

12-13. Then the worst thing of all happened. Nebuchadnezzar ordered his general to destroy the Temple. He set on fire not only the Temple but also the royal palace and all the houses of the officials.

14-16. He also ordered his troops to

break down the wall around the whole city. Then he took those who had surrendered and all the skilled craftsmen to Babylon. Only the poorest people were left.

17-23. Before he set the Temple on fire, he took all the furniture, the golden utensils, and even the two bronze pillars by the entrance of the sanctuary with him.

24-27. He also took the high priest, his associate, and three other Temple officials with him to Babylon. Then he took the commander, his assistants, five advisers to the king, their two assistants, and sixty important men to see Nebuchadnezzar. The king had all of them whipped and executed, just as the Lord had said.

28-30. Of the people Nebuchadnezzar took with him to Babylon the three times he captured Jerusalem, only 4,600 made it there alive. The rest died on the way.

31-34. After Nebuchadnezzar died, the next king was kind to King Jehoiachin, who was still in prison from a previous capture. He had been in prison for thirty-seven years. The king released him and gave him new clothes and a place to stay. He also let him eat at the palace for the rest of his life.

Lamentations

INTRODUCTION: *This book was also written by Jeremiah. It was written after Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were taken captive by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. Lamentations is a very sad poem. It talks about the hardships of the Jewish people and how they finally realized that they were being punished because of their wickedness.*

The Sorrow of Jerusalem

1 The city of Jerusalem is deserted. Once she was honored by the world, but now she's like a widow. She was a queen city, but now she's a slave. All night she cries, but no one comforts her. Even her friends have turned against her.

3. The land of Judah has been invaded, and her people taken captive. They were forced to leave and become slaves in a foreign country. They have no hope of escape.

4. The roads to Jerusalem weep because no one travels to celebrations at the Temple. Her gates are empty, and her priests sigh and groan in pain.

5-7. The Lord has let this happen because of Jerusalem's sins. Her children are captives; her glory is gone. Her leaders have no strength, and Jerusalem is in ruins. She remembers her days of glory and how she fell into the hands of her enemies when no one came to help her. They all laughed at her.

8-9. Jerusalem has sinned. She now weeps and hides her head in shame. Too long she held on to her selfish ways and didn't think about the future. Her downfall was terrible. In her suffering she now cries to the Lord.

10. Her enemies took all her trea-

sure. They came into the Temple, into the Most Holy Place where no one but the high priest is supposed to go.

11. Her people are hungry. They give any treasure they have for food. They cry to the Lord for help; everyone else hates them.

12-14. Jerusalem cries out to those who pass by, "Don't you care? Look at me! Have you ever seen anyone suffer this much? God let me be taken captive because of my sins. He let me feel pain. My sins turned into a yoke around my neck. My strength failed, and I was helpless against my enemies.

15-17. Our strongest troops could do nothing. The pride of our nation was destroyed; Jerusalem was crushed. She cries, but no one comforts her. Her children are destitute. She reached out her hands for help, but no one cared. Her neighboring nations have turned against her; she has become a hated city.

18-19. She says, "I know that God is good. He has not totally turned against me. He still cares about me. My young men and women have been taken captive and live in exile. My friends have betrayed me. My priests and elders were slaughtered in the streets while looking for food.

20. "Lord, look at me! My heart is broken! I'm sorry for my sins. I've been so stubborn. Outside, the sword awaits me. Inside, there's pain and darkness. **21-22.** "Everywhere they hear my groaning, but no one comes to help me. My enemies celebrate their victory. May they suffer for their sins too. Let their wickedness displease You, Lord. May You carry out justice on them, as You did on me. My suffering is almost more than I can take."

God's Displeasure

2 The Lord has humbled Jerusalem and taken away her pride. He has thrown her glory to the ground and turned His back on the Temple. He has allowed all the vil-lages in the land to be swallowed up. Our defenses are gone. The Lord has brought disgrace on His kingdom and shame on our rulers.

3-4. In His displeasure the Lord has refused to help us. He has allowed our enemies to come like a destroying fire. It seems as if the Lord aimed His own arrows at us. Those who were the pride of our people have all been killed.

5-7. The Lord has destroyed our country; our palaces are in ruins. Jerusalem is filled with mourning. The Temple has been destroyed; no one worships on the Sabbath. There are no special days of celebration. The Lord has left His Temple and has let His enemies tear down its walls. They give a shout of victory in our place of worship.

8-10. The walls of Jerusalem have fallen; her gates are destroyed. Our rulers and leaders have been taken captive. No one teaches God's law, and the prophets have no visions. Old men sit on the ground in shame; they sprinkle dust on their heads in grief.

Little girls walk down the streets with heads bowed low.

11-12. My eyes are tired from crying. I'm exhausted with sorrow when I see my people hurting, when I see children crying from hunger. They beg their mothers for food; they faint in the streets; they die in their mothers' arms.

13. What can I say to comfort Jerusalem? No one has suffered the way that she has. Her wounds are deep. No one can heal her and remove her pain.

14. The false prophets she loved told her nothing but lies. Their visions were not true, and their preaching never pointed out her sins. Their teachings led her astray.

15-16. All who pass by Jerusalem look at her and laugh. They shake their heads and say, "Is this the city they called Beautiful? Is this the place they called the joy of the world?" Her enemies make fun of her. They look at her with hatred in their hearts. They say, "We've finally destroyed her. This is the day we've been waiting for, and now it has come."

17. The Lord has done what He said He would. He warned Jerusalem, but she didn't listen. He gave her enemies courage, strength, and victory.

18-19. The hearts of the people cry out to the Lord for help. Let your tears flow, Jerusalem, to relieve your heart. Let your tears flow day and night until the Lord hears and comes to help you. Pour out your heart to Him. Ask Him for mercy for you and your children. Everywhere I look, the little ones are starving.

20-21. Lord, look! Mothers are killing their babies for food! Prophets and priests are killed while standing in the Temple. Young and old alike lie dead next to each other in the streets. Even little boys and girls are being killed.

22. Lord, You let our enemies bring on a festival of horror. Not one of us has escaped the sorrow and pain. My own relatives, the young ones I cared for and helped raise, have all been killed.

Jeremiah's Anguish

3 I have seen so much pain. I know what it is to suffer. The Lord made me walk in darkness rather than light. He led me by the hand and made me suffer again and again, until I felt as if someone had beaten me.

5-9. He surrounded me with enemies. He made me taste bitterness and then lie in darkness like a dead man. He put me in chains and led me away. When I cried to Him for help, He did not answer. He led me along a hard path. He hedged me in, and I could not escape.

10-11. He waited for me like a lion, and then pounced on me like a bear. He dragged me into the bush and left me there to die.

12-13. I became a target for His arrows. They pierced my heart and went deep into my body.

14-16. I became the laughingstock of my people. They sing ugly songs about me. The Lord has filled me with pain. I feel as if He hit me and broke my teeth, then pushed my face into the mud.

17-19. I have forgotten what it's like to live in peace, to be prosperous and happy. My strength is gone, and I feel no reassurance from the Lord. My suffering and pain is a bitter pill, poisoning my soul.

20-24. When I think of my condition, I would give up were it not for a glimmer of hope in the compassion of the Lord and His love for me. His faithfulness is new every morning, as refreshing as the dew and as sure as the sunrise. The Lord is all I have. My hope is in Him.

25-27. The Lord is good to those who seek Him. It's good to hope in the Lord and patiently wait for Him, to wait for Him to rescue us. It's good to bear burdens and to put our hope in Him while we're young.

28-30. When we suffer because of our sins, we should keep holding on to the Lord even as we bear our pain. We should give in to Him, because He is our only hope. Let us learn not to fight those who hit us, those who disgrace us.

31-33. The Lord is full of compassion; He will not push us to one side forever. He lets lesser evil come to prevent greater evil later. He allows sorrow, but it's mingled with mercy and love. He does not willingly bring sorrow and grief.

34-36. The Lord knows when our spirits are crushed and how much we suffer. The Lord knows when our rights are taken away. He knows when justice is perverted and we're no longer given the protection of the law.

37-38. No one can make anything happen unless the Lord allows it. Good and evil are under His control.

39-40. Do we have a right to complain when we suffer for our own sins? Let's turn back to the Lord.

41-43. Let's lift up our hearts to the God of heaven and say, "We confess our sins and our rebellion against You. You have not excused what we have done. You have disciplined us because You love us, because You care about us and want to save us."

44-47. You hid Yourself behind a thick cloud. Our prayers did not get through. You let the nations treat us like garbage. They have insulted us and made fun of us. Our country has been destroyed because of our sins.

48-50. My eyes cry rivers of tears over the pain and suffering of my people.

The tears don't stop. I will not stop crying and praying until the Lord looks down and sees all this.

51-52. My heart hurts when I see what has happened to all the daughters of Jerusalem. My people treated me like an enemy when I talked to them about their sins.

53-55. They arrested me and lowered me into a pit and threw stones at me. I sank deep into the mud, and water was over my head. Before I came back up, I thought it was the end. I cried to the Lord for help.

56-58. The Lord heard my cry for help. He did not close His ears to my prayer. You came close to me in the pit and told me not to be afraid. You sent friends to come and pull me out. You came to my rescue. You saved my life!
59-60. Lord, You have seen how my own people have treated me and what they have done to me. Stand up for me, Lord. Those who don't like me are still making plans to kill me. You know how much they hate me.

61-62. You have heard their insults and threats. You know what they have in mind. You know what they whisper in secret and the plans they openly make to get me.

63-66. From morning until night they talk against me and ridicule what I have said. Lord, give them a taste of suffering for what they have done. Let them feel what it's like to be cursed by one's own people. If these people continue to act this way, destroy them in order to save those who love You.

The Desolation of Jerusalem

4 How quickly gold can lose its value and fine gold its luster! The sacred stones of the Temple lie scattered in the streets. Our sons and daughters are worth more than gold, but our enemies treat them like dirt.

3-4. Suffering has caused our people to become as heartless as an ostrich with her young. The tongues of little babies stick to the roofs of their mouths because of thirst, and their mothers let them die. Children cry for food, but they're pushed aside, and no one cares.

5-6. Those who lived in luxury and ate nothing but the best lie in the streets. Those who dressed in the best are sitting by the garbage dump looking for food. The punishment of our people is worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrah, which were destroyed in an instant without pain.

7-8. Our princes were once pure and good. They were healthy and strong. Now they walk the streets, and no one even looks up. Their bodies are thin, and their skin is like leather.

9-10. Those who were killed are better off than those who are still alive and starving to death. Women who were once loving mothers are so hungry that they cook and eat their own babies.

11-13. The Lord has let our enemies come because of our sins. They have set the city on fire. Our people did not believe that our enemies could conquer Jerusalem. But it happened because our false prophets and wicked priests turned on innocent people and killed those who disagreed with them.

14-16. Now these false prophets and wicked priests walk the streets as if they were blind. People look at them and shout, "Get away from us! Don't touch us!" These men are treated this way, no matter where they live. No one wants them. They are no longer respected and honored.

17. Our people looked for help, but no one came. From the towers our watchmen looked for a nation to come and help us, but no one can save us.

18-19. Our enemies surround us. They watch our every move and are ready to attack. The end is near. Our days are numbered. Our enemies are like eagles in the sky. When we escaped, they chased us into the mountains and spotted us in the desert.

20. They captured our king. They caught up with him as he fled. We thought that under his leadership we would become a respected nation, as other countries have.

21. Laugh on, you neighboring nations. God will discipline you, too. You will be attacked and stripped naked to your shame.

22. We must pay the consequences of our sins. But the Lord will not let us stay in captivity forever. Our neighboring nations will pay for their sins too. But they will perish and be no more.

A Plea for Restoration

5 Lord, look at us and see our disgrace. Our land has been taken from us. Foreigners live in our houses. We're like orphans; our fathers have been killed, and our mothers have become widows.

4-5. We have to buy the water we need and pay for wood to build a fire. They whip us like donkeys as we work, and we are not allowed to stop and rest.

6-7. In the past our people had to submit to the Egyptians and then to the Assyrians. Our ancestors are dead

and gone. But we have to suffer the consequences of their sins.

8. Now we're ruled by the Babylonians, who took us captive and make us work like slaves. There is no way to escape. No one dares to come and free us from their hands.

9-10. Murderers roam the countryside. When we go out of the city to look for food, we risk being killed. Our skin is as hot as an oven, and we are dying of hunger.

11-13. Our women have been mistreated. Our leaders have been tied up and hung by their hands. Our old men have been cruelly treated. Our young men and boys are made to work until they stagger under the load.

14-15. Our elders no longer judge the affairs of the city. Our young people have stopped singing. There is no joy in our hearts. Our dancing has turned into crying.

16-18. Our king is gone, and we are ruled by foreigners. Our hearts are sick; our eyes grow dim. Jerusalem is in ruins; jackals prowl the streets.

19-20. But we know, Lord, that Your kingdom is forever. It never ends. Why are You letting this go on so long? Will You ever think of us again?

21-22. Lord, save us, and bring our people back home. Restore us as we were in the good days gone by. Have You rejected us completely? Will You ever be pleased with us again?

Ezekiel

INTRODUCTION: *The prophet Ezekiel wrote this book. He was taken captive when the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem the second time. His ministry in Babylon among his fellow captives covers about twenty years, from 590 to 570 B.C. Ezekiel wrote to the people back home that the Babylonians would come against Jerusalem again, and this time would destroy it. He acted out many of his prophecies. Ezekiel encouraged his people by telling them that their captivity would end and that God would bring them back home. Then he described a new land and a great temple that he saw in vision.*

A Vision

1 When I was thirty years old and one of the exiles in Babylon, the Lord gave me a vision. The heavens opened, and I saw the glory of God. This was during the time when King Jehoiachin was also a captive.

3-4. One day when I was beside the river in Babylon, the power of the Lord came over me. I saw many symbols. First, a windstorm came down from the north, then a huge cloud with lightning. The middle of the cloud seemed to be on fire.

5-8. As it came closer I saw four beings inside that looked like men, but each one had four faces and four wings. Their legs were like the front legs of a bull, and their feet were like hooves. Under each wing was a man's hand holding it up.

9. These beings stood opposite each other, and their outstretched wings touched, making a square. They could move in any direction without turning their heads.

10-11. Their front face looked like that of a man, the right one like a lion, the left one like a bull, and the back one like an eagle. Two of their wings were stretched out, and the other two were folded over their bodies.

12-14. As a group they could move

together in any direction. They were always guided by the Holy Spirit. Flames of fire moved back and forth among them. When they moved, they moved as fast as lightning and always together.

15-18. Then I saw a wheel under each being, and it touched the ground. Each wheel had another wheel crosswise inside of it. This way each set of wheels could move in any direction without being turned. And the rims of the wheels were covered with eyes.

19-21. When the beings moved, the wheels moved. Wherever the Holy Spirit told the beings to go, they went, and so did the wheels. These beings were powerful and guided the wheels whichever way they should go.

22-24. Above the beings I saw a huge crystal platform. When they used their wings, it sounded like the roar of the sea, like a huge waterfall, or like the voice of God when He speaks. When the beings stopped, they folded their wings.

25-27. Then I heard a voice coming from above the platform. It was coming from a throne sparkling as a blue sapphire in the sun. Sitting on the throne was the figure of a man. From the waist up, his body glowed like

fire, and from the waist down, his body was wrapped in flames.

28. Above the throne was a beautiful rainbow. I knew I had seen the Lord! I threw myself face down on the ground, and heard a voice speaking to me.

Ezekiel's Call

2 The voice said, "Ezekiel, stand up. I want to talk to you." Then the power of the Holy Spirit came over me and stood me up. The Lord said, "Ezekiel, I'm giving you a message for the exiles who are with you. They're a very rebellious bunch, just like their ancestors. They're stubborn and very proud. Tell them what I have to say to them, whether they will listen or not.

6-8. "Don't be afraid of them even though you will feel as if you're surrounded by thorns and scorpions. These people are very rebellious. So listen to Me, and don't you resist Me, as they do. Open your mouth and eat what I'm going to give you."

9-10. Then He reached out to me, and in His hand was a scroll. He unrolled it, and I saw writings of grief and pain on both sides.

God Talks to Ezekiel

3 The Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, take this scroll and eat it. Then go and speak to the people for Me." So I opened my mouth, and God fed me the scroll. He said, "Eat it all up until you're full." So I did, and it tasted as sweet as honey.

4-7. Then He said to me, "Now that My message is part of you, go to the people and tell them what I want them to know. I'm sending you to Israelites, not to those who speak another language. They would listen to you, but My people won't. They're very stubborn and defiant.

8-11. "I'm going to make you just as stubborn as they are. I'll make you as solid as a rock so nothing can weaken My message. Don't be afraid of them no matter how they act. Now listen carefully to what I have to say and take it to heart. Then go and tell your fellow exiles what I've said, whether they listen to you or not."

12-13. Then the power of the Holy Spirit came on me, and I heard a voice behind me like the sound of a mighty wind. It said, "Glory to God! Praise Him in His heavenly sanctuary!" I also heard the sound of wings and rushing wheels.

14-15. So I went to speak to my fellow exiles with dread in my heart. I felt sick at my stomach, but the power of the Holy Spirit kept me going. I went to the Kebar River to see the exiles there, and stayed with them one whole week. But I said nothing, because I was still stunned by what I had seen and what I had been told to say.

Ezekiel, a Watchman

16-17. At the end of the week the Lord said, "Ezekiel, I have called you to be a watchman for Me. So listen to what I'm telling you.

18-19. "When I give you a message to tell someone he will die unless he changes, and you don't give him the message, I'll hold you responsible. But if you give him the message and he doesn't change, then I will not hold you responsible.

20-21. "Now, if a good man stops being good and does wicked things, and you don't warn him, I'll hold you responsible. But if you warn him and he changes back, you have carried out your responsibility.

22. "Right now I want you to come to the open field, because I want to talk to you some more."

23. So I went, and the glory of the Lord filled the sky. It was the same glory I had seen by the Kebar River when the Lord spoke to me there. I threw myself on the ground in awe.

24-25. Then the Holy Spirit stood me on my feet and said, "When you go back home, lock the door. Then get ready to speak to the people. When you do, they will have ropes in their hands ready to tie you up."

26-27. "But I will give you a calm spirit so that you can talk to them without becoming angry, even though they're very rebellious. I'll help you tell them whatever I have said. Keep working with those who listen. But for those who don't, leave them alone, because they're still rebellious."

An Illustration

4 While I was at home getting ready to go and talk to the people, the Lord spoke to me and said, "Take a large clay tablet and draw a picture of Jerusalem on it. Draw ramps up to its walls and enemy troops around it. Also, take a large flat iron pan to put between you and the drawing, as if it were a shield."

4-5. "Take the drawing and the iron pan and stand them up on the ground. Then lie on your left side in front of the drawing at different times each day for more than a year. Each day will represent the number of years My people from the northern kingdom have turned against Me."

6. "After that, do it again for forty days on your right side. Each day will represent the number of years those from the southern kingdom have turned against Me."

7-8. "As you lie there at different times of each day, keep looking at the picture of Jerusalem you drew. Shake your fist at it and say, 'The Lord will

tie Jerusalem up so the city cannot escape from what is coming.'

9-11. "Then take some wheat, barley, beans, and lentils, mix them up, and store them in a pot. That's what you'll eat during this time. Eat no more than a half pound of this food, and drink no more than three cups of water at regular times during the day."

12-13. "Next, build a fire using dried human manure. Bake your bread and eat it where people can see you. This will let your fellow exiles know what the people of Jerusalem will have to go through to survive."

14-15. I said, "No, Lord! I have never used dried human manure to build a fire! I have never even eaten meat from a sick animal that died or any other unclean thing." The Lord said, "All right, I'll let you use dried cow manure instead."

16-17. Then He said, "I will cut off the supplies of food coming into Jerusalem, and the people will have to ration their bread and water to survive. Soon they will run out of both, and they will be shocked at how awful they all look."

Ezekiel Shaves His Head

5 The Lord spoke to me again and said, "Ezekiel, after you finish lying on your side, I want you to shave your head and beard. Then weigh the hair and divide it into three equal parts."

2. "After that, lay the drawing of Jerusalem on the ground, put a third of your hair on it, and set it on fire. Take another third, spread it around the drawing, and use your knife to chop it up. Then throw the last third into the air and let it blow away."

3-4. "Keep back a few hairs and throw some of them into the fire. They represent the people of Jerusalem. Fire

will sweep throughout the city to all the people in Judah."

5-7. The Lord also said, "Jerusalem rebelled against Me and became more wicked than any nation around her. She rejected My laws and refused to listen to Me.

8-10. "Therefore, this is what the Lord says: 'Because you have been more wicked than the nations around you, I will discipline you in front of them as I have never disciplined you before. During the coming war, things will get so bad that your people will sacrifice and eat their own babies.

11-13. "'And because you defiled My Temple, I will show no mercy. A third of your people will die of starvation and disease. A third will be killed defending the city. And a third will be scattered and chased by the enemy. Then you'll feel what it's like to be without Me. This will convince you how much I hate sin and wickedness.'

14-17. "Jerusalem will be ridiculed. The nations will look at her with disgust for turning against her own God. I will cut off her food supply. I will send wild animals to attack her. Disease will sweep through the land. The sword of war will be against her."

A Message for Judah

6 The Lord spoke to me again and said, "Ezekiel, look toward the mountains of your homeland and write down this message: Mountains of Judah, this is what the Lord says: 'I am going to bring the sword of war against you. I will destroy your places of idol worship. You will be killed as you kneel in front of them asking for help.

6-7. "'Your cities and towns will be destroyed. Your idols will be smashed. Everything you worked for will be gone. Many of your people will be

killed, and those who survive will know that I am the Lord.

8-10. "'I will let some of you be taken into exile and scattered among the nations. Then you'll remember how much you hurt Me by your rebellion and wickedness. You'll also know that I didn't let these troubles come on you for nothing.'

11-12. Then the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, go out in the street, clap your hands, stamp your feet, and shout: 'Because of all the wicked things that my people have done, many will be killed or will die from disease, whether they live inside Jerusalem or outside.

13-14. "'Their dead bodies will lie in front of their gods and be scattered across the hills and in the woods—wherever they had their idols. I will destroy their country. Not one place will be spared. Then they will know that I am the Lord.'"

The End Has Come

7 Again the Lord spoke to me and said, "Ezekiel, this is what the Lord says about the land of Judah: 'The end has come! I will discipline you as you have never been disciplined before. I will show no mercy, but will punish you for every disgusting thing you have done.

5-9. "'Your country is doomed. Your days of joy and celebration are over. It won't be long before you feel My discipline. I will punish you for what you have done. Then you will know that I am the Lord and that I discipline those I love.

10-13. "'War and violence will come to your land such as you've never seen before. I will let the Babylonians come again and destroy everything. Your wealth will be taken; buyers and sellers will weep. No one

will recover what he lost as long as he lives. This prophecy is certain and will not change.

14-15. "Back home they will blow the trumpet and prepare for war. But they will not be able to leave the city, because the Babylonians have surrounded it and are waiting to kill all who come out. Those inside will die from hunger or disease.

16-18. "Those who do escape and make it to the mountains will be afraid for their lives. Their arms will have no strength, and their knees will shake. They will shave their beards and cover their heads in shame.

19-22. "They will throw their money in the streets for their enemies to pick up, but it will not save them. They used their jewelry to make idols, and now they hate what this has done to them. I will give their silver and gold to their enemies. They will come and loot the city and My Temple, and I will look the other way.

23-25. "Killing and bloodshed will be everywhere. The most wicked of your enemies will come and take your houses, and your strong men will not be able to stand up against them. You will look for peace, but will see only despair.

26-27. "One disaster will follow another. You will long for a prophet to give you good news, but there will be none. No elders will tell you what to do. The king will mourn, princes will lose courage, and the people will shake with fear. I will punish you for all the wickedness that you have done. Then you will know that I am the Lord."

Demon Worship in the Temple

8 In the sixth year of our captivity some of our leading men came to see me. As we were talking, the

Holy Spirit gave me a vision. I saw what looked like the shape of a man. From his waist down, his body looked as if it were on fire, and from the waist up, it glowed like polished bronze.

3-4. He took me by the hair, lifted me up high above the earth, and took me to Jerusalem. He set me down in the inner courtyard of the Temple, where I saw a huge idol. Suddenly the glory of the Lord was there also.

5. Next, I found myself in the part of the Temple where the priests work. The Lord said to me, "Look at that idol at the north entrance." I looked, and what I saw was disgusting. Now I knew how God felt.

6-8. The Lord said, "You think this is bad. Let Me show you something worse." He took me to another part of the Temple where there were lots of rooms. I noticed a little hole in one of the walls. The Lord said, "Make the hole a little bigger and then crawl inside." So I did, and inside I saw a door.

9-10. The Lord said, "Open it up and go in, and you'll really see some disgusting things." I went in and saw a wall full of paintings of gross-looking animals, snakes, creeping things, and all the idols in Israel.

11. As I stood there, seventy elders came in. They stood in front of the wall and began worshipping these paintings, trying to communicate with the dead. The father of one of the elders had been King Josiah's secretary, and very faithful to the Lord.

12-13. The Lord said, "See what these men are doing? They're worshipping demons and think that by doing it in this room, I won't see them. They think I have left the country. But let Me show you something still worse."

14-15. Then He took me to another part of the Temple, where I saw women crying over one of the idols. During the

dry season this idol supposedly dies. Then it's resurrected and brings on the rains to ripen the crops. These women were trying to make sure that the idol came back to life. The Lord said, "You think this is bad. Let Me show you something even worse than that."

16. He took me into the sanctuary itself, between the sacrificial altar and the entrance to the Holy Place. There I saw the high priest with twenty-four of his priests standing with their backs to the Holy Place, facing the rising sun. They were bowing down to it as if it were a god.

17. The Lord said, "Did you see all this? Is this something small? Should I overlook it? How long will these people keep on insulting Me like this? They turn their backs on Me in My own house and worship the sun.

18. "Twice I disciplined them by letting the king of Babylon come and take Jerusalem. But this time there will be no mercy. Even if they shout in My ears, I will not listen."

The Angel With a Writer's Kit

9 Still in vision, I heard the Lord call out, "The investigation is over. Bring in the men with their weapons."

2. Then I saw six men come into the Temple, each with a weapon in his hand. One of them was dressed in a white robe like the one that the high priest wears. He had a writer's kit strapped to his side. They all came in and stood by the altar of sacrifice.

3-4. Then I saw the dazzling light of the glory of the Lord rise up between the two angels in the Most Holy Place and move out to the courtyard. The Lord said to the man in the white robe, "Go through the city and put a mark on the forehead of those who are grieving over the

wickedness they see and are praying for help."

5-7. Then He turned to the others and said, "Follow him though the city and destroy all those who don't have My mark. Have no mercy, no matter how old or young they are. Start right here in the Temple." So they went through the Temple and the city, just as the Lord told them to do.

8. While this was going on, I threw myself face down on the ground and pleaded, "O Lord, aren't there a few left who love You? Will all our people have to die?"

9-10. He said, "The people are guilty of some terrible things. Besides the worship of idols, the city is full of corruption, injustice, violence, and murder. Because I haven't done anything about it, they think that I don't care. So now I'll be as unmerciful to them as they have been to others. But I will spare those who have My mark."

11. Then the man with the writer's kit came back and said, "Lord, we have carried out Your command and have done everything You have asked us to do."

The Lord Leaves the Temple

10 I was still in vision and saw a throne high above the four beings with the four wings. The Lord said to the man in the white robe with the writer's kit, "Go among the wheels under the four beings. Take some burning coals from the fire and scatter them over the city."

3-5. The four beings were just south of the Temple when the man went among the wheels. The dazzling light of the Lord's presence left the Most Holy Place. Then a huge cloud covered the Temple, and the courtyard was filled with His glory. Next, I heard the sound of wings as the four beings prepared to leave.

6-7. The man in the white robe went to get the coals from the fire, but went only as far as the wheels. Then one of the beings reached into the fire and gave him the hot coals, and the man left.

8-11. I took another look at the four beings, and again I noticed a hand under each of their wings. Also, I saw the two intersecting wheels under each being, one crosswise with the other. That way the beings could move any direction without having to turn.

12-14. Each being was covered all over with eyes, including their wings and hands. The eyes I was told represented the wisdom of God. And each being had four faces: that of a man, a bull, a lion, and an eagle. These represented the four leading tribes of Israel.

15-17. These beings were the same ones I had seen in my first vision. When they moved, the wheels moved, and when they spread their wings, they went up, and so did the wheels. The power of the Holy Spirit was in the wheels, and He told the beings where to go.

18-19. Then I saw the dazzling light of the Lord leave the courtyard and rest over the four beings south of the Temple. They spread their wings and briefly hovered over the eastern gate with the Lord above them.

20-22. These beings standing beneath God's throne were the same four beings, with four faces and four wings that I had seen before.

Wicked Counselors

11 Then the Holy Spirit picked me up and took me to the eastern gate of the Temple, where twenty-five priests were. The Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, these men are telling the people to build houses and do business, because they're as

safe inside the walls of Jerusalem as meat in a cooking kettle is safe from the fire."

5-6. Then the Holy Spirit told me to write: "This is what the Lord says: 'You men are wicked. You're giving the wrong advice to people. I know all about you. You have sentenced many innocent people to death and have filled Jerusalem with violence.

7-9. "'The only "meat in the cooking kettle" that will be safe are the people who are dead. But you men will be driven out of Jerusalem and will die on the other side of its walls. You're trying to convince yourselves that nothing will happen. But the sword of war will come, and your enemies will drive you out of the city.

10-12. "'The Babylonians will slaughter you all the way to the borders of Judah. Then you'll remember what I have told you. You have not listened to Me or kept My laws, but have copied the evil practices of the nations around you.'"

13. In vision I also saw one of these wicked leaders suddenly die. Then I threw myself facedown on the ground and cried, "O Lord, does this mean that You're going to let the few people left in Jerusalem be destroyed?"

God's Promise

14-15. The Lord replied, "Ezekiel, you and your relatives who are in exile are looked down on by the people in Jerusalem. They think that you were a bad prophet, and that's why I let you be taken captive. They think they're better than you are and that I love them more than you.

16-18. "Give your relatives and the other exiles this message: 'Even though I let you be taken from home, I'm here with you and watching over you. I will bring you back home and

restore what you lost. When you come back, I want you to remove all the idols that are left in the land.

19-20. "I will put a spirit of unity in you and give you an undivided heart. I will take out your stubborn hearts of stone and give you hearts of kindness and obedience. Then you will faithfully keep My commandments and obey My laws. You will be My people, and I will be your God.

21. "As for those who don't repent and change their ways, whose hearts are still attached to their idols and continue to worship them, I will punish them for what they are doing."

22-23. While still in vision, I saw the four beings with the wheels standing under the throne of God. They spread out their wings, and the dazzling light of the presence of God left the Temple and hovered over the Mount of Olives.

24-25. Then the Holy Spirit picked me up and took me back to Babylon. The leaders visiting in my house were still there, waiting for me to come out of vision. So I told them everything I had seen and what the Lord had told me.

Unbelieving Exiles

12 Later the Lord spoke to me again and said, "Ezekiel, you're living among some very rebellious exiles. They have eyes but don't see. They have ears but don't hear. They're very stubborn and defiant.

3. "I want you to pack your belongings as you did when you were taken into exile. Do it during the day so that the people can see you. Then leave as if you were going to another place to live. Maybe this will catch their attention and let them know that more people from home will be coming to join them, which they don't believe.

4-6. "While they're watching, bring

your belongings outside, then just before it gets dark, leave. Don't go out the door. Dig a hole in the wall and crawl out. Then put your pack on your shoulders, cover your face, and walk into the sunset. This means that those back home will cover their faces in shame as they're taken into exile."

7-11. I did what the Lord said and left just as it was getting dark. The next morning the Lord said, "Ezekiel, go back and tell the people who saw you leave that it was a sign of what will happen to King Zedekiah and the people back home as they leave the city and are taken captive.

12-13. "King Zedekiah will pack his things, dig a hole in the palace wall, cover his face, and leave the city. But they will catch him, put out his eyes, and take him to Babylon, where he will die.

14-16. "His officials and bodyguards will scatter, but the sword will go after them, and many will be killed. Some will survive and be scattered among the nations. They will tell the people that what happened was not because their God was weak, but because of their own wickedness."

17-20. Later the Lord said, "Ezekiel, I want you to eat in front of the people. Shake all over as you eat. Then tell them that this is what the Lord says about the people back home: 'They will shake with fear as they eat their bread and drink their water. Their cities will be destroyed and their country devastated. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

21-25. Then the Lord spoke again: "Ezekiel, the people back home keep telling each other that time will go on and that My prophecies mean nothing. Write and tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'I will put an end to such thinking. All your false visions

of peace will vanish, and you will see things happen just as I've told you."

26-28. Once more the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, the people back home keep telling themselves that your visions have to do with things in the distant future. Send them this message: 'The Lord says that His prophecies will not be delayed. What He has said will be fulfilled.'"

False Prophets

13 The Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, prophesy against the false prophets. Say to them that this is what the Lord says: 'Woe to those who follow their own ideas, saying they have had visions. What they say has not been a help to My people. Their visions are false, and their prophecies are lies.

7-9. "'You say that I have spoken to you in visions, which I have not. Because of your lies, I have no choice but to punish you. Your names will not be listed among those who survive the captivity and return home.

10-12. "'You have led My people astray by talking peace when there is no peace. So the people have built a wall of false expectation in their minds, and you painted it white to make it look good. I will send the winds of war against it. It will fall, and the people will wonder what happened.

13-16. "'Their wall of false hope will be leveled to the ground, and the false prophets who gave the people this hope will die. The wall that was so white and beautiful will be destroyed in My indignation, and so will those who said there would be peace when there was none.'"

17-19. Then the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, tell the women who prophesy that this is what the Lord says: 'Woe to the women who wear magic charms

on their wrists and magic scarves on their heads. How long will you enrich yourselves by selling your false visions and prophecies? Many believed your lies, and people are dying because of it.

20-21. "'I hate those magic charms. I will tear them from your wrists and heads to save My people from your delusions. They will no longer listen to you. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

22-23. "'You've discouraged good people and brought them grief, which did not come from Me. You've made no attempt to stop the wicked in their wickedness. Your false visions and dreams are over. I will save My people from your influence, and you will know that I'm the Lord.'"

Idolatry

14 One day the leaders among the exiles came to see me, and asked about the Lord's will for the people. While we were talking, the Lord spoke to me, saying, **3-5.** "Ezekiel, these men love their idols. Do you think that I should answer their questions? Tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'If anyone sincerely comes to a prophet for advice, even though he is living in sin and worshipping idols, I will answer him. I will do this to save My people from their sins and to recapture their hearts.

6-8. "'But you need to turn from your idols and repent. If anyone turns away from Me to worship idols and then out of fear comes to a prophet for advice, I will answer him by cutting him off from My people.

9-11. "'If a false prophet deceives people, I have allowed it for a reason. I want them to see that his prophecies are wrong. Then I will destroy him, together with those who kept going to

him. Then those who are left will stop worshiping idols and will be loyal to Me, and I will be their God."

Noah, Daniel, and Job

13-14. Then the Lord spoke to me again, saying, "Ezekiel, if a whole nation turns against Me, I will discipline that nation by sending a famine in the land. Even if Noah, Daniel, and Job lived there, by their goodness they could save only their own lives. They loved Me, but they couldn't save a city or a country, as I can.

15-20. "If I sent wild animals through the land, these men couldn't save their wicked sons and daughters. If I sent the sword of war against it, they couldn't save their wicked relatives. If I sent a disease throughout the land, they couldn't save their wicked grandchildren. Neither could they save any country, even if all three of them lived there.

21-23. "I will send famine, wild animals, war, and disease against Jerusalem because of its wickedness. Those who survive will be brought to Babylon, and you will see for yourself their evil ways and rebellious attitude. Then you will understand why I had to discipline them."

A Parable

15 The Lord asked me, "Ezekiel, is a grapevine better than a tree? Is Judah better than other nations, that I should not discipline her? Do people go to a grapevine for wood to build a fire or to make a tool? They go there for grapes. And if a vine is useless for making things when it's fresh, how much less when it has been burned?"

6-8. "That's the way Jerusalem is. Its love for Me has dried up. I will turn her over to the fires of war, even

though she's been burned twice before by Nebuchadnezzar. This time the land of Judah will look like a wilderness, because of the wickedness of the people and their unfaithfulness to Me."

God's Love for Jerusalem

16 The Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, I want you to send a message to Jerusalem and remind her of the disgusting things she's been doing. Tell her that this is what the Lord says:

3-5. "'As a city you were born to pagan parents, and they named you Jebus. But I renamed you Jerusalem. Your parents did not take care of you. They left you in the field to die. You were dirty and not even wrapped in a blanket. No one wanted you.

6-9. "'Then I passed that way and saw you. I stopped and said, "Don't cry, little one. I'll take care of you." And that's what I did. You grew to be tall and beautiful. When you got old enough, I asked you to marry Me. You agreed. So we got married, and I took an oath to be yours, and you took an oath to be Mine.

10-14. "'After we married, I provided you with beautiful dresses, fine leather sandals, and costly silk for your shoulders. I gave you bracelets and earrings and a crown for your head. You ate nothing but the best. You were more beautiful than ever. The nations heard about your beauty and riches and were eager to meet you.

Jerusalem's Pride

15-18. "'But you trusted in your beauty and became proud. You became famous, and used the gifts I gave you to build places of worship for your idols. You used the gold and silver I provided to make gods, and the

dresses I gave you to dress them up.

19-22. “You took the animals and grain I gave you and offered sacrifices to these idols. I, the Lord, your husband, saw all this. To make things worse, you even sacrificed our infant sons and daughters to these gods. You forgot who found you in the field, all dirty and not even covered with a blanket.

23-26. “As if this wasn’t enough, you built pagan shrines on every street corner in the city. You invited other nations to come and worship with you, including the Egyptians, and to bring their gods along with them.

27-34. “I had to remove My protection. The Philistines came into the land and were shocked at what they saw. First you invited the Assyrians, and then the Babylonians, to come and be a husband to you. You also worshiped their gods. You even paid other nations to come to be a husband to you. You’ve become a slave to your own desires.

35-38. “Because you have done all this, I will remove My protection and take back My gifts. I will pass sentence on you as I would any woman brought into court for sacrificing her babies to idols. Even though all this hurts, I have no choice but to punish you for what you have done.

39-43. “I will tell other nations to come and invade your land. They will tear down your shrines and take your treasures. They will burn down your houses and put an end to your idol worship. I will do this to help you remember who found you in the field and took care of you. But your punishment will end, and once again you will belong to Me.

44-47. “People will say, “Like mother, like daughter.” That means you’re no different than your parents. You’re

also like your sisters, Sodom and Samaria. They too were wicked. They lived to the south and north of you. You weren’t satisfied to do what they had done; you had to outdo them.

48-50. “Your sister Sodom never did the disgusting things you did. She and the little cities around her had plenty to eat, but they never fed the poor and needy. They got to the place where they refused to change their ways, and so I had to destroy them.

51-52. “Your sister Samaria and the little cities around her didn’t sin half as much as you have. You’ve done worse than both of your sisters. They were good compared to you. You even argued for the right to do what you were doing. That’s why I had to punish you as I did.

53-55. “But I will have mercy on all of you. I will bless the descendants of Lot who lived in Sodom and escaped. I will also bless the descendants of Samaria who changed. After I discipline you, I will bless you. And once again My people will prosper.

56-58. “At the height of your wickedness you wouldn’t speak to your sisters. You even made fun of them. You laughed at their destruction. Now it’s your turn. You will suffer the consequences of your immorality and wickedness.

59-60. “You have left Me. You have broken our marriage vow. But I will not forget you. I will remember the day we were married and the promise I made to be your husband.

61. “The day will come when you will remember whom you married. You will be ashamed of having left Me and of laughing at your sisters. Then you will come back to Me and take in your sisters’ children as if they were your own. I too will welcome them.

62-63. “I will renew My marriage vow

to you and let you know that I am still your husband. I will pay for all your sins and redeem you to Myself. Then you will remember everything I have done for you. You will feel ashamed of yourself and will determine never to do it again. I, the Lord, have spoken.”

The Eagle and the Vine

17 The Lord said to me, “Ezekiel, I want you to tell this parable to the people: ‘A huge eagle, with beautiful feathers and powerful wings, flew to the mountains and broke off the top shoot of a cedar tree. He took it to a city of Babylonian merchants and planted it.

5-6. “‘Then he flew to Israel, picked up a seed, and planted it near some water. It sprouted, and grew into a spreading vine. Its branches reached up toward the eagle, and its roots went deep into the ground for water. It was beautiful, with many branches and leaves.

7-8. “‘After that, another large eagle with beautiful feathers and powerful wings came along. The vine turned its branches toward this eagle, hoping to be replanted and have more water. But it already had good soil and plenty of water.’

9-10. “Ask the people: ‘Will the owner let the rebellious vine live? Will he transplant it where it wants to go? Will he not strip it of its fruit and leaves and let it die?’

11-14. “Go ahead, go to the people, tell them the parable, and then ask them what it means. They won’t know. Then say to them, ‘King Nebuchadnezzar went to Jerusalem and carried her king to Babylon. Then he took a little-known member of the royal family, made him king, and signed a peace treaty with him.

15. “‘Later the new king rebelled and

made an agreement with Egypt. He bought horses and chariots, and even hired troops to help him against Babylon. Will Nebuchadnezzar let him get away with it?’

16-18. “As surely as I live, the new king will be captured and taken to Babylon, where he will die. Not even his powerful army will be able to serve him. The king of Babylon will come against Jerusalem and take it. The new king took an oath in My name to keep the treaty with Babylon, but then broke it. He will not escape the consequences of what he has done.

19-21. “I will punish him for going against his oath and breaking the treaty he made. I will see to it that he is taken to Babylon for his lies and for the disgrace he brought on My name. His best troops will be killed in battle, and the rest will run.

22-24. “I will take a shoot from My own tree and plant it in Israel. It will grow and become a great cedar. All kinds of birds will come to find shade and to nest there. It will rule as king over all the trees of the forest, and they will know that I cut down those who are proud and make those who are humble grow. I, the Lord, have spoken. I will do what I have said.”

Everyone Is Judged

18 Again the Lord spoke to me, saying, “Ezekiel, what do the people mean when they say, ‘The parents ate sour grapes, and their children taste the bitterness’? That proverb does not apply to Israel. Each one will be responsible for his own sins. The children will not die because of the sins of their parents.

5-9. “Suppose a man is honest and does what is right. He doesn’t worship idols. He doesn’t take advantage of people. He pays his debts. He doesn’t

steal. He feeds the hungry and helps the needy. He doesn't charge for giving loans. He loves Me and keeps My commandments. He's a good man and will be given eternal life.

10-13. "Now, suppose this man has a son who lies, steals, and kills. He does all the bad things his father wouldn't think of doing. He worships idols, takes advantage of the poor, cheats people, and takes part in disgusting pagan rituals. Is he a good man? Will he be given eternal life? Of course not. He has no one to blame but himself.

14-18. "Suppose this son has a son who sees all the wicked things his father is doing and decides to follow his grandfather's example. He doesn't lie, steal, or cheat, but feeds the hungry and helps the needy. He loves Me and keeps My commandments. He's a good man and will be given eternal life. But his father will die with the wicked because of his own sins.

19-20. "You say to Me, 'Why doesn't the son share the guilt of his father?' Because the son has done what is right. That's why he will be given eternal life. The man who sins, he's the one who will die. Guilt can't be passed on. Good things will be credited to the man who does them, and bad things will be charged against the man who does them.

21-23. "Now, suppose a wicked man turns from his wicked ways and does what is right. He loves Me and keeps My commandments. He will be given eternal life. None of the bad things he did will be charged against him. Don't you think I'm happy when I see people change?

24. "On the other hand, if a good man stops doing good and starts doing wicked things, will he be given eternal life? Absolutely not. None of the good things he has done will be credited to him. He will die in his sins.

25-29. "You say, 'That's not fair!' Listen to Me. Should the God of Israel be unjust? People are the ones who are not just. If a good man turns bad, he will die. If a wicked man turns good, he will live. People say that's not fair. Why isn't it? Is their way better? Can bad children inherit goodness? Should good children inherit guilt?

30-32. "Listen to Me. I will judge everyone by what he has done. If the people repent and change their ways, they will live. If not, their sins are their downfall. Why should they destroy themselves? They should come to Me for new hearts and a new spirit. I want them to live and not die. So they need to repent and change their ways."

A Funeral Song

19 The Lord said to me, "Write out this funeral song for the two kings of Judah—the one who was taken to Egypt and the one who was taken to Babylon. 'Jerusalem was like a beautiful lioness that raised her cubs among the lions.

3-4. "'One of her cubs grew to be a strong lion. He went after his prey without fear. But then he began to eat people. The nations heard about it and came and trapped him. They pulled him out of the pit with hooks and dragged him to Egypt.

5-9. "'When the lioness saw what they had done, she took the next cub and trained it too. He grew up and became very proud. He went after his prey without fear, but soon began to eat people. When he roared, they shook with fear. The nations came and caught him with nets. They pulled him into a cage with hooks and took him to Babylon.

10-14. "'Jerusalem was also like a grapevine planted in good soil next to water. It was very fruitful and towered

over all the other vines. But enemies came, pulled it up, and threw it to the ground, and some of its branches were burned. Then they took what was left and replanted it in a very dry place. But soon fire broke out, and nothing was left."

People's Defiance

20 In the seventh year of our exile some of our leaders came to see me. They wanted to know if I had a message from the Lord. Then the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, give them this message: 'You have come to Me for counsel, but I have nothing to say to you. I have counseled you again and again, but you won't listen.'

4-5. "Ezekiel, are you ready to pronounce sentence on them for Me? If you are, tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'I made a covenant with My people when they were still in Egypt.

6-8. "'I promised to take them to the beautiful land of Canaan. But they had to get rid of their Egyptian idols and stop worshiping them. They refused. So I had to discipline them by keeping them in Egypt.

9-12. "'To protect My reputation, I couldn't wait any longer. I finally decided to bring them out of Egypt. And I did. I gave them good laws and commandments. I told them to keep the Sabbath as a sign of bonding between Me and them, and as a reminder of who I am.

13-17. "'But they rebelled and broke the Sabbath. I had plenty of reasons to destroy them. But because of Moses' prayer and for the sake of My reputation, I didn't do it. Also, I didn't forget the promise I made to bring them into the land of Canaan. I did this in spite of what they were doing to Me. I loved them and had mercy on them.

18-20. "'I told their children not to follow their parents' example. I told them to keep My commandments, but they didn't listen either. They broke the Sabbath, which was a sign between us and a reminder of who I am.

21-24. "'They refused to listen to Me, and continued to break the Sabbath and My commandments. I had good reasons to destroy them, but I remembered the promise I had made, and so I didn't do it. I knew that if they didn't change, I would have to do something.

25-26. "'So I let them make their own rules and worship their idols. They even sacrificed their own babies to these idols. I was hoping they would see how terribly wicked they were and would change their ways and come back to Me.'

27-29. "Ezekiel, tell the leaders this for Me: 'After My people settled in the land of Canaan, they kept right on doing the same things. They continued worshiping their idols and offering sacrifices to them. I asked them why they were doing this, and they blamed Me for starting it.'

30. Then the Lord spoke to me again and said, "Ezekiel, I want you to tell the people that this is what the Lord says: 'How long will you continue to do the wicked things your ancestors did?

31. "'Even here in exile you keep worshiping idols and offering your babies to them. Then you send your elders to Me to find out what I want you to do. I have nothing more to say. No matter what I say, you don't listen.

32-34. "'You always want to be like those around you and do what they do. But they identify you with Me. So what does that do to My reputation? As surely as I live, I will continue to discipline you. After that, I will bring you back home, and peo-

ple everywhere will see My power.

35-38. "I will discipline you as I disciplined your ancestors at Sinai. I will use My rod to stop your wickedness, and you will obey Me again. I will make a difference between those who are rebellious and those who are not. Those who are will be freed from Babylon, but I will not bring them home.

39-40. "Go ahead and worship your idols. But the time will come when you will again honor My name. When you come home, you will worship Me and bring your sacrifices and offerings to My Temple.

41-44. "I will bring you back, and all the nations around you will see it. Then you will know that I am the Lord. You will remember the wicked things you did, and hate yourself for the pain you have caused Me. You will know that I disciplined you out of mercy because I love you."

45-48. The Lord spoke to me once again: "Ezekiel, go and look toward the south. Then prophesy to the trees and mountains of your homeland, and tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'I am about to set your trees and cities on fire. Your enemies are coming, and many people will be killed. I have sent the fire, and will not let it end until it does what I have sent it to do.'"

49. I said, "Lord, don't make me give a message like that! People will hear me talking to trees and mountains and will think that I've lost my mind. They're already accusing me of that, and are saying that my messages are nothing but nonsense."

Babylon's Sword

21 The Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, go and look toward Jerusalem. Then prophesy against it, saying that this is what the Lord says: 'I will bring the sword of war against you. The

innocent will suffer with the guilty across the land, both north and south. The war will not stop until the sword has done its appointed work.'

6-7. "Ezekiel, weep over Jerusalem. When the exiles ask why you're crying, tell them it's because of what's coming on Jerusalem. Tell them that when they hear the news about what has happened, their hearts will melt, their hands will hang limp, their knees will shake, and their courage will be gone. It is coming! It will take place!"

8-11. Later the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, prophesy to the people and tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'The sword is coming against Jerusalem. This sword is sharp and polished. Judah has despised My counsel, shrugged off My discipline, and disobeyed My laws. The sword of war is already in the hands of her enemies.'"

12-13. The Lord continued: "Ezekiel, groan in pain, because the sword is coming against the king and princes of Jerusalem. They will die like the rest of the people. Beat your chest in grief. Why have the people refused to listen to Me? Why do they continue to shrug off My discipline? Why do they refuse to change?"

14. "So go and prophesy against them. Bring down your fist to illustrate the striking of a sword. Twice before, Jerusalem was struck by war. Now it will happen again. But this time the city will be totally destroyed.

15-17. "Hearts will melt with fear, and many people will be killed. I have ordered the sword of war to come and do its job. I too will bring down My fist, and the sword will come against Jerusalem. Only then will My discipline stop."

18-20. Then the Lord said, "Ezekiel, make a drawing of the roads that Nebuchadnezzar will take coming out of Babylon. Make the roads cross and

go to different cities—one to the capital of the Ammonites and the other to Jerusalem. The king will ask his god which one he should attack first.

21-22. "He will throw arrows on the ground, and then pick up the one that has the name Jerusalem on it. So that's where he'll go first. He'll order his men to use battering rams against her gates, and attack to kill without mercy.

23. "When the people back home hear what you say to your fellow exiles, they'll shrug it off as a false prophecy. They'll think they're safe because of the peace treaty that Babylon made with them. But they have broken the treaty, and that's why Nebuchadnezzar will come against them."

24-25. This is the message the Lord has for the people of Jerusalem: "Everyone knows you've rebelled against the king of Babylon and against your God. That's why you will be taken captive and join your brothers in exile. As for your king, his day has come.

26-27. "Nothing will be the same again. The rich will be brought low, and the poor will be exalted. I will overturn many kingdoms, including Jerusalem. She will not become a new city until He who can rightfully claim it comes, because I have given it to Him."

28-29. The Lord continued: "Ezekiel, prophesy against the country of Ammon and say, 'The sword of war is drawn for slaughter. It's sharp and polished and ready to use. The visions that your prophets say they had are not true. They have lied. Their predictions are false. Your wickedness is great. Your day is coming.

30-32. "'Put your sword away. I will bring the sword of war against you, and you can't stop it. You will taste My discipline. Men skilled in war and

slaughter will come and will have no mercy. Your blood will flow in the streets. As a nation you will disappear. I, the Lord, have spoken.'"

The Wickedness of Jerusalem

22 The Lord spoke to me again, saying, "Ezekiel, are you ready to confront Jerusalem for Me, a city full of violence and wickedness? Tell her that this is what the Lord says: 'You have become the murder capital of the world.

4-5. "'I am holding you responsible for all the violence and murders committed in your streets, for your immoral practices and idol worship. Your end has come. Other nations laugh at you because you can't control the lawlessness in your own country.

6-12. "'Your princes misuse their power. Young people treat their parents with contempt. You have been hard on foreigners, widows, and orphans. You hate what's holy and dishonor My Sabbaths. You protect evil men and shed innocent blood. You force your neighbor's wife to sleep with you. And some of you even hire yourselves out to kill.

13-16. "'I will bring down My fist against you, and your strength and courage will fade away. I will let the sword of war come against you, and you will be scattered among many nations. I will put an end to your wickedness. You will reap what you have sown. I am the Lord.'"

17-22. Later the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, the people of Judah are useless. They're like scrap metal. Tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'As men put silver, copper, and iron into a furnace to melt it down, so I will turn Jerusalem into a furnace and use war to melt away your

wickedness. Then you will know that I am the Lord.”

23-25. Again the Lord spoke to me and said, “Ezekiel, prophesy against Judah and say, ‘Your land has become unholy. Because of your wickedness you’re not getting any rain. Your princes and leaders act like lions ready to kill to get what they want.

26. “‘Your priests can’t tell the difference between what’s holy and what isn’t. They break My commandments. They don’t teach people what’s right and wrong, what’s clean and unclean. And they close their eyes to the importance of the Sabbath.

27. “‘Your local officials act like wolves, attacking people and tearing them apart. They execute the innocent just to get what they want.

28-29. “‘Your prophets cover up the sins of the city with false visions and lying prophecies. They tell the people that these visions are from Me when they’re not. The wealthy take advantage of the poor. They lie, cheat, and deny people their rights.

30-31. “‘I looked for someone to stand in the gap where the wall of obedience has crumbled and begin to repair it. But there was no one to do it. So I will turn against Jerusalem and destroy My own city. I will discipline the people for what they have done. I, the Lord, have spoken.’”

Two Sisters

23 Later the Lord said to me, “Ezekiel, once there were two sisters. While they were in Egypt they both worshiped idols. It was like letting men come and sleep with them. These two sisters represent My people, especially those in the cities of Samaria and Jerusalem. I took them out of Egypt and brought them to the land of Canaan.

5-8. “The older one left Me and followed the Assyrians. They all wore sharp uniforms, and their officers were handsome. She loved them and worshiped their gods. She went right back to what she had done in Egypt.

9-10. “Finally I had to let her go. Assyria came, destroyed Samaria, and took her sons and daughters captive. People knew that she was being punished for what she had done.

11-16. “The younger one saw what happened to her sister, but she didn’t change. She became even worse. She followed the Assyrians, those handsome men in blue uniforms, and worshiped their gods. Then she saw pictures of the Babylonian troops dressed in red and followed them.

17-21. “Soon she followed others. Everyone knew the kind of woman she was. It hurt Me to see what she was doing to herself. I had to turn away in disgust. Then she became even more bold, and followed the Egyptians, as she had done when she was young. She longed to recapture her youth.

22-24. “Tell her that this is what the Lord says: ‘I will stir up the Babylonians, and they will come against you from all sides. Troops from other nations will join them. They will come against you from the north with a large army wearing helmets and shields. They will come against you with chariots and all the weapons of war.

25-27. “‘I will let them come to punish you, and I will not interfere. They will cut off the noses and ears of your people and kill many others. They will take your sons and daughters captive and throw your infants into the fire. They will take your clothes and jewelry and strip you naked. I will not stop them. Never again will you worship idols.

28-35. "The Babylonians will take everything you own and let you stand in the street naked. You have brought all this on yourself. You followed in your sister's footsteps, so you will receive the same punishment she did. You will drink the same cup of sorrow and drain it dry. You will suffer for what you have done."

36-39. Then the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, pronounce judgment on both sisters. I want you to summarize their sins and write down their wickedness. They have sacrificed their own babies to idols. They have defiled My Temple and broken My Sabbaths. On the same day that they sacrificed their infants to idols they came to My Temple to worship Me."

40-44. "Again and again those sisters put on jewelry and eye shadow, and invited in their friends. All kinds of men would come and bring them bracelets and crown them queens. Then they would party all night with both of them. These same men would return again and again."

45-47. "But the men from Assyria and Babylon are more honorable than that. They will come and punish these sisters for Me. I will give Samaria and Jerusalem into their hands. They will kill their children and burn down their houses. They will put an end to their love life with idols."

48-49. "This will also be a warning to other nations. The two sisters will reap what they have sown. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

The Rusted Pot

24 In the ninth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity and ours the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, write down today's date, because Nebuchadnezzar has surrounded Jerusalem."

3-5. "Now go and do this in front of your fellow exiles: Build a fire and set a rusted pot on it. Then slaughter a sheep, put some of its meat and bones into the pot, and bring it to a boil."

6-8. "Jerusalem is like this potful of meat. I want you to empty the pot one piece of meat at a time. That's what will happen to the people of Jerusalem. They will either be killed or taken to Babylon. The city is full of violence and bloodshed. Therefore, I will let war come, and her blood will be shed too."

9-11. "Woe to Jerusalem, a city full of violence and murder. I will start a fire that will burn away her wickedness. Put more wood on your fire, and cook the meat well. Then empty the pot and set it back on the fire until it glows and until all the scum and rust are burned away."

12-13. "Jerusalem has rejected My efforts to save her. The first two fires did not remove all the wickedness. She is like this rusted pot. I tried to remove all the scum and rust, but she wouldn't let Me. This time I will send a terrible fire against her until she stops her wickedness."

14. "The time has come for Me to act. I will not overlook her wickedness, nor will I have mercy."

Ezekiel's Wife Dies

15-17. Then the Lord said, "Ezekiel, your wife is going to die soon. The delight of your eye and the joy of your heart will be taken away. I'm letting this happen for a reason. I don't want you to cry. I don't want people to hear you sobbing or see you walking barefoot. Grieve quietly and alone. And don't have a funeral meal for people."

18-19. So in the morning I shared the illustration of the pot with the people, and in the evening my wife died. The

next morning I went outside but held back my tears. The people said to me, "Why aren't you crying? What is that supposed to mean?"

20-21. I said to them, "The Lord told me not to cry, and this is what He said: 'Tell the people that I will destroy the Temple, the delight of their eyes and the joy of their hearts. And I will not save the sons and daughters you leave behind.'

22-24. "'When you hear that Jerusalem is taken, I don't want you to cry or go barefoot to show your grief. Keep your turbans and sandals on. Don't mourn over your sons and daughters, but mourn over your sins and wickedness. Follow My prophet's example. When the Babylonians take Jerusalem, then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

25-26. Then the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, I will destroy My Temple and take away the delight and joy of My people. I will also take away many of their sons and daughters. When this happens, you will hear about it, because some of them will escape and come and tell you.

27. "Also, I'm going to take away your voice for a while, and then give it back to you so you can speak for Me again. You will be a sign to confirm what I have said. And they will know that I am the Lord."

The Country of Ammon

25 After I had buried my dear wife, the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, prophesy against the little country of Ammon, whose people are descendants of Lot. Tell them that this is what the Lord says: **3-5.** "'You were thrilled when you saw the country of Judah devastated, My Temple destroyed, and My people taken captive. Therefore, I will let the

desert tribes come against you. They will invade the country and live off your land. I will turn your capital city into a place for camels and sheep.

6-7. "'Because you clapped your hands and jumped for joy over what happened to My people, I will hand you over to other nations. They will come and plunder your cities and your land. I will destroy you, and you will never be a nation again. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

The Country of Moab

8. The Lord said, "Ezekiel, now prophesy against the little country of Moab, also descendants of Lot. Tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'You have said that Judah and her God are no different from other nations and their gods.

9-11. "'Therefore, I will let war destroy your fortified cities, the pride of your nation. I will let the desert tribes come and invade your country and live off the land, just as they will live off the land of Ammon. You will never be a nation again. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

The Country of Edom

12. The Lord said, "Ezekiel, prophesy against the little country of Edom. They are descendants of Esau, Jacob's brother. They hate the people of Judah.

13-14. "Tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'I will stretch out My hand against you. Your flocks and herds will be slaughtered, your cities destroyed, and many of your people will be killed. I will let you feel the strong hand of My discipline. I, the Lord, have spoken.'"

The Country of Philistia

15-17. The Lord said, "Ezekiel, proph-

esy against the Philistines and tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'You took advantage of My people when I drove them out of their land because of their wickedness. Therefore, I will stretch out My hand against you. I will let you feel My displeasure, and you will know that I am the Lord.'

The City of Tyre

26 In the eleventh year of our captivity the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, the people of Tyre are saying, 'Jerusalem lies in ruins, that city that traded with nations. We will now take her business and prosper.'"

3-5. "Tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'I will destroy the city of Tyre. I will bring many nations against you. They will destroy your walls and pull down your towers. I will even have them sweep you up like dust until you're as bare as a rock. Fishermen will come and spread their nets there to dry. I, the Lord, have spoken.'

6-9. "'Surrounding towns will also feel the sword of war. I will bring the Babylonians against you. Their king will come with horses and chariots and a very large army. He will set up siege works against you and attack your gates and towers.

10-12. "'He will come with so many horses and chariots that the ground will shake. The horsemen will ride through your streets killing everyone in sight. They will loot your stores, take your wealth, destroy your houses, and throw your rubble into the sea.

13-14. "'I will put an end to your noisy songs. The music of your guitars will stop. I will make your place as bare as a rock. You will never be rebuilt. I, the Lord, have spoken.

15-17. "'When you fall, cities along

the coast will tremble. The slaughtered will lie in your streets and groan. Kings will take off their royal robes and sit on the ground in fear. They will sing this funeral song about you: 'The famous city has been destroyed. She has fallen. Her ships have been swept away. She's gone.'

18-19. "'The cities along the coast tremble. The islands of the sea are stunned and terrified. I will turn you into a ghost town where no one will live again. Ocean waves will wash over you, and you will be no more.

20-21. "'I will bring you to a terrible end. I will bring you down to the grave, and you will be no more. They will look for you but will not find you. Never will you come back again. I, the Lord, have spoken.'

A Funeral Song

27 Then God said to me, "Ezekiel, mourn for the city of Tyre, the city that was full of merchants. Tell her that this is what the Lord says: 'You took pride in your beauty and thought you were perfect. **4-7.** "'You sat like a beautiful ship in the middle of the sea. Your builders used the best wood—cedar, oak, and cypress. They inlaid your deck with ivory. They made your sails from linen and your awnings from the finest blue and purple cloth.

8-11. "'Your deckhands came from Sidon, but the sailors and captains were your own. Ships from everywhere pulled into your port to trade with you. You hired men from other countries to make up your army. They brought glory and victory to your city. They manned your towers, and hung their shields on your walls.

12-17. "'You did business in Spain and Greece. You traded goods for horses and slaves. Nations paid for

your goods with ivory, emeralds, rubies, and embroidered cloth. Israel and Judah paid for your goods with wheat, olive oil, and spices.

18-24. "Syria paid you with wine and wool, the Greeks with iron, and Arabia with lambs and goats. Assyria and Babylon also traded with you. They paid for your goods with purple cloth, embroidered rugs, and beautiful carpets.

25-28. "You sit in your harbor like a glorious ship filled with riches. But they will take you out to sea, and a storm will break you to pieces. Your riches, your sailors, and your captains will be gone. The shouts of drowning men will be heard on shore, and those who hear them will be afraid.

29-31. "Sailors and captains from other nations will weep over the loss of such a beautiful ship as you. They will shave their heads and put on clothes of mourning.

32-36. "They will cry out in pain: 'O city of Tyre, you are now so silent. Your goods went everywhere, but now you are broken.' Everyone who hears the news will be stunned. Kings along the coast will be terrified. Merchants of the world will hide their fears. You have come to your end, and never will be again."

A Prophecy Against Tyre

28 The Lord said, "Ezekiel, prophesy against the king of Tyre. Tell him that this is what the Lord says: 'You think you're a god. You sit on your throne and act like one. But you're only a human being. Do you know the future as the prophet Daniel knew it?'"

4-5. "By your wisdom you have made your city rich. You have much gold and silver. You have profited by your business skills and have become wealthy and proud.

6-8. "Because you think you know the

future as I do, I will bring a ruthless nation against you. They will draw their swords and destroy your beauty and everything you have. They will bring you to your knees and kill you. You will die, and you and your city will be buried in a watery grave.

9-10. "What will you say to those who are ready to kill you? Will you tell them that you're a god? To them you're just a man. They will kill you, and you will die like a dog at their hands."

A Prophecy Against Satan

11-12. The Lord spoke to me again and said, "Ezekiel, write out this prophecy against Satan, who is behind such men as the king of Tyre. This is what the Lord says:

13. "When I created you, you were perfect, full of wisdom and beauty. You were in heaven and talked with Me, as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. You were the leader of the angels and stood next to Me. You wore garments of gold covered with jewels. I gave all this to you when I created you.

14-15. "You were the anointed cherub and stood at My right hand. You were with Me on My holy mountain and walked in the fire of My presence. You were blameless from the day I created you until pride came up in your heart and you sinned.

16-17. "Then your nature changed, and you became jealous of My Son. So I had to expel you from heaven. You started to fight, and I had to force you to leave. You were proud of your wisdom and beauty and had too high an opinion of yourself. That led you to rebel against Me.

18. "So I expelled you from heaven, and you walked the earth in shame. But you didn't change. You offered your evil to the people of the world,

and they started trading with you. You twisted the truth about Me and defiled My sanctuary. So I will bring down fire on you and destroy the global city you have built and reduce you to ashes.

19. "The people who bought your goods will stand by and watch. They will be shocked when they see whom they were trading with, and who you really are. You will come to your end, and will be gone forever."

A Prophecy Against Sidon

20-22. The Lord spoke to me again, saying, "Ezekiel, prophesy against the city of Sidon. Tell her that this is what the Lord says: 'I have set My face against you as I did to your sister Tyre. People will praise Me for disciplining you. They will know that I am the Lord when I do this.'

23-24. "'I will send you sickness and the sword of war. There will be blood on your streets. Your enemies will come at you from all sides. You and your neighbors will no longer look down on Jerusalem and be a thorn in her side. When I restore and bless Jerusalem, then you and your neighbors will know that I am the Lord.'

Blessings on Israel

25-26. "Yes, I will bring My people back home from where I have scattered them. When the nations see this, they will know that I am the Lord. I will give My people back their own land. They will build houses, plant vineyards, and live in peace. I will discipline the nations for looking down on My people. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

A Prophecy Against Egypt

29 In the tenth year of our captivity the Lord spoke to me about the king of Egypt.

This was before I had the vision about the city of Tyre. Actually, over the years I had a number of visions about Egypt. The Lord said, "Ezekiel, prophesy against the king of Egypt and tell him that this is what the Lord says:

3-5. "'I am against you. You're like a huge crocodile sunning itself by the river Nile. You think you own the river. But I will put a hook in your jaws and pull you out to the desert, where you will die.

6-9. "'When Judah asked you for help against the Babylonians, you were no help at all. You were like a thin stick that Judah leaned on, and when she did, it broke, and you pierced her hand and wrenched her shoulder. Therefore, I will bring the sword of war against you. Many of your people will be killed, and your country will be devastated.

10-12. "'I am against your country from north to south. No one will live in your important cities for the next forty years. I will scatter your people, and they will flee as refugees to many countries.

13-15. "'At the end of forty years I will bring your people back and restore your country. But it will not be as strong as it was before. Never again will it rule other nations.

16. "'Judah will never again ask you for help. She will not depend on your strength. My people will remember their sin of leaning on you instead of Me. Then they will know that I am the Lord.'"

Babylon's Reward

17-18. Let me jump ahead almost seventeen years to the twenty-seventh year of our captivity. The Lord spoke to me about Egypt and Babylon. He said, "Ezekiel, the king of Babylon has ended his long siege of Tyre and

has destroyed her. Yet he and his troops were never rewarded.

19-20. "Therefore, Egypt will be Babylon's reward. Nebuchadnezzar will defeat the king of Egypt, loot his cities, and plunder the country. He will take the wealth of Egypt back to Babylon. This will be his pay for doing what I asked him to do.

21. "When the days of Judah's exile end, My people will trust Me and become strong again. Then I will give you, Ezekiel, a respected place among My people, and you will teach them for Me. They will listen to you and will know that I am the Lord."

Egypt Will Fall

30 The Lord continued: "Ezekiel, write down this prophecy against Egypt. Make it plain that this is what the Lord says: 'Your day of doom has come. It's a day of darkness for you and many nations. The sword of war will come against Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan. Many people will be killed, and the wealth of Egypt will be carried away.

5-8. "Troops from other countries, even those from Israel who tried to defend Egypt, will all be killed. Egypt's proud army will also be destroyed. Her cities will be in ruins. The whole country will look like a wilderness. They will know that I am the Lord when I set her land on fire.

9-12. "Those who escape will take the news of her defeat everywhere. It will frighten other nations, such as Ethiopia. But Egypt's doom is sure. I will send Nebuchadnezzar against her. He will defeat her mighty army and strip her of her wealth. His troops will destroy her cities and devastate her land.

13-16. "I will destroy her idols and take away her false gods. Not one

prince will be left alive. There will be fear throughout the land. I will punish her cities and set them on fire.

17-19. "Men from Heliopolis, the city of the sun, and men who serve the cat-headed goddess will fall by the sword. It will be a dark day for the cities of Egypt when her power is broken and her people taken captive. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord."

20-22. Back in the first month of the eleventh year of our exile the Lord had already spoken to me about Egypt, saying, "Ezekiel, I have decided to break the right arm of the power of the king of Egypt, and he will never be able to hold a sword again. Actually, I will break both arms, and the sword will fall from his hands.

23-26. "I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put My sword in his hand. The arms of Nebuchadnezzar will be strong, but the arms of the king of Egypt will hang limp. Then when Egypt is defeated and her people are scattered, the nations will know who is carrying My sword."

Egypt Is Like a Tree

31 Two months later the Lord spoke to me and said, "Ezekiel, prophesy against Egypt, and tell the king that this is what the Lord says: 'You are a powerful country. What should I compare you to? I can compare you to Assyria. She was like a huge tree with large branches and lots of roots. Streams flowed around it, and it grew bigger than all the trees in the forest.

6-9. "Various kinds of birds nested in its branches, and animals came to stand in its shade. Many nations fell under its shadow. Assyria was like a majestic cedar tree, like those in the Garden of Eden. No other tree in Eden

was as big as the cedar. All other trees wanted to be like it.

10-13. "But Assyria became proud and very wicked. So I handed her over to the king of Babylon. He came with his troops and cut down the mighty cedar, and its branches fell on the mountains and into the valleys. All nations under its shadow disappeared. Birds came and perched on the fallen branches, and animals walked among them.

14-15. "'I will let no other trees grow as tall as the cedar, no matter how well watered they are. On the day the cedar fell, I held back the rivers. I brought darkness over the forest, and the smaller trees began to cry and die.

16-17. "'The nations trembled at the sound of the great cedar's fall. They were terrified when they saw it go down. Then all the choice trees went down with the cedar. The nations who had lived under its shadow went to the grave to join the men of war already there.

18. "'Egypt can be compared to Assyria. But like that mighty cedar, Egypt too will go down to the grave and join those who have been killed by the sword of war. I, the Lord, have spoken."

A Funeral Song

32 The next year, the twelfth year of our captivity, the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, this prophecy is a funeral song for the king of Egypt. Write it out and say that this is what the Lord says: 'You think you're like a lion, but you're more like a crocodile. Your thrashing churns up the river mud and pollutes the streams.

3-8. "'I will throw My net over you and drag you to shore. Then I will take you to the mountains and let the birds and animals feed on your body.

I will blot out the sun, and the moon will not shine. Your land will be plunged into darkness.

9-10. "'Nations will tremble when they hear the news of your destruction. Their hearts will fill with terror. People will be shocked. Kings will tremble for their lives.

11-14. "'I will send the sword of Babylon against you. Nebuchadnezzar and his troops will come and crush the pride of Egypt. He will defeat your mighty army and destroy your cattle. No longer will their hooves muddy the edge of the river. But the waters will settle and become clean again.

15-16. "'When I destroy Egypt, I will make her land desolate. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord. The women of Egypt will chant a funeral song and mourn for the land and her people."

The World of the Dead

17-19. Two weeks later the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, cry for the people of Egypt. They will go down to the grave and be with the dead from other countries. Egypt thinks that it is smarter and more beautiful than other nations, but this won't help them. They will be killed and join the rest of the dead, including the outcasts.

20-25. "The people of Egypt will be killed and buried in common graves. Others will be dragged away. Dead kings and armies wait in the grave for the commanders and troops of Egypt. Assyria and her army is there, as well as the nation of Elam and her troops. They sleep with the dead and lie in disgrace.

26-28. "Armies from other nations whose troops terrorized people also lie there in shame. They were not given an honorable burial, as were warriors of old who were buried with

their weapons and shields. Egypt is no different. She will be crushed, and her king will be killed and buried with his troops.

29-30. "The kings and troops of Edom are also there. So are the kings of Syria and Sidon. They were all killed and buried in disgrace. They sleep with the wicked and all those killed in the war.

31-32. "The king of Egypt and his men will have one consolation. They will be with kings and armies whom they had defeated before. Once he was My sword to discipline other nations. But because of his pride, he and his men will lie in the grave with the wicked and unclean. I, the Lord, have spoken." This was the last of the many visions I had about Egypt.

The Duties of a Watchman

33 Later the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, tomorrow you'll hear about the fall of Jerusalem. Tell your fellow exiles not to be discouraged. The Lord says, 'When people from a nation expect war, they pick one of their own to be a watchman. And when he sees the enemy coming, he is to blow the trumpet to warn them.

4-6. "'If someone hears the trumpet but doesn't pay attention to it and gets killed, he is to blame for his own death. If he had paid attention, he could have saved his life. But if the watchman sees the enemy coming and doesn't warn the people, then even if only one person gets killed they will certainly hold the watchman responsible. And so will I.'

7-9. "Ezekiel, I have chosen you to be My watchman. So listen to what I have to say, and warn the people for Me. When I give you a message for someone, and you don't warn him and he dies, I will hold you responsi-

ble. But if you warn him, and he doesn't pay attention and dies, you will not be held responsible.

10. "So go to your fellow exiles and tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'Before the fall of Jerusalem you wouldn't listen to Me. You thought you were suffering because of what your ancestors had done, not because of your own wickedness. Now you've gone to the other extreme and wonder if there's any hope for you at all.

11. "'I take no pleasure in seeing sinners die. But I do find pleasure when they turn from their wicked ways and live. So turn from your wickedness and come back to Me. Why would you want to die?

12-13. "'The good things a man does will not save him if he keeps on living in sin. Neither will a man's past wickedness condemn him if he turns away from his wickedness and comes back to Me. If I were to tell a man that he would live because of the good things he has done, he would put his trust in those things and keep right on sinning.

14-16. "'If I warn someone who is wicked, and he turns and does what is right, he will not die. If he gives back what he has stolen, stops living in sin, and turns to Me, he will live.

17-20. "'You keep saying that the Lord is not just. But that's the way you look at things. If a good man stops doing good and starts doing evil, he will not live. You keep saying that it's not fair. But it is. I will judge everyone according to the way he lives.'"

The News of Jerusalem's Fall

21-22. On the fifth day of the tenth month in the twelfth year of our captivity a man who had escaped from Jerusalem came and told me the bad news: the city had fallen. The night

before, the Lord had given me back my voice so I could talk to the man.

23-24. The Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, the people back home are telling themselves, 'If our country was given to Abraham, then it surely belongs to us, because we are the descendants of Abraham.'"

25-26. "Send them this message: 'Some of you are still worshiping idols and killing innocent people. What makes you think that the land belongs to you? You do all sorts of wicked things. How can the land rightfully belong to you?'

27. "'Those of you who think this way and are still living in the ruined cities of Judah will be killed by those who want to get what was left by the Babylonians. And those of you living in the country will be killed by wild animals. Those of you who escaped to the mountains will die of disease.

28-29. "'I will turn the country of Judah into a wasteland, and her pride will come to an end. Her mountains will be filled with such violence that no one will travel that way. When this happens, then you'll know that I have done this because of your sins.'"

Disobedience

30. The Lord continued: "As for you, Ezekiel, don't be deceived by the politeness of the people from now on. They're talking about you in their homes and on the streets. They say, 'Come, let's go listen to the prophet and hear what the Lord has to say.'"

31. "So they come and listen to you, but they have no intention of changing their ways. They talk about their loyalty to Me, but they're just as greedy for money and ready to sin as they were before.

32-33. "As far as they're concerned, you're just good entertainment, no

different from those who play instruments and sing love songs. They listen to what you have to say, they hear My words, but they won't do them. When the hour comes, and it will, they will know that a prophet has been among them."

False Shepherds

34 The Lord spoke to me again, saying, "Ezekiel, prophesy against the shepherds of My people and tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'Woe to you shepherds who care about yourselves and not about the flock.

3-4. "'You eat the most expensive food and wear the best clothes, but don't take care of My people. You haven't strengthened the weak, helped the sick, comforted the hurting, brought back those who have strayed, or gone after the lost. Instead you have ruled over them and treated them harshly.

5-6. "'So the sheep scattered and became an easy prey for wild animals. They wandered all over the mountains, and no one tried to find them and bring them home.

7-8. "'So listen to Me. Because My sheep have been attacked by wild animals and you didn't go looking for them, I am against you. You haven't been taking care of My sheep—you've been looking after yourselves.

9-10. "'You need to listen to what I have to say. I will hold you responsible for My people. I will take My sheep away from you and never let you take care of them again.

The Good Shepherd

11-13. "'I will go look for My sheep and will find them. As a good shepherd watches over his sheep, so I will watch over My sheep and care for them. I will look for them in all the countries

where they live and bring them back home. I will gently lead them to green pastures and beside still waters.

14-16. "They will lie down in peace and rest. I will be their shepherd and care for them. I will heal the broken-hearted, strengthen the weak, and heal the sick. I will destroy all those who got fat from eating My sheep. I will do what is right and carry out justice.

17-19. "I will separate the sheep from the goats. Some of you sheep didn't stay in the place you were assigned, but trampled down the whole pasture area. It wasn't enough for you to drink from the quiet streams—you had to wade in and muddy the waters. Why should the rest of the sheep have to eat trampled grass and drink muddy water?

20-22. "I will judge the sheep and separate the proud from the meek. When it's feeding time, you use your shoulders and horns to push the weak sheep out of the way. I will come and save My sheep, and no one will hurt them anymore.

23-24. "I will be their Shepherd, and they will be My sheep. I will put My Son in charge, and He will come and care for them. I will be their God, and the new David will be their shepherd.

25-27. "I will renew My covenant with them and guarantee their safety. I will rid the land of wild animals so that they can feed without fear. I will lead them to My holy mountain and send them showers of blessing. The trees will bear fruit, and the earth will bear crops. My people will live securely in their own land. I will bring them back from exile, and they will know that I am the Lord.

28-31. "Their enemies will no longer plunder their land. There will be nothing to make them afraid. I will bless their land, and it will give them boun-

tiful harvests. There will be no more famine and hunger. The nations will no longer look down on My people. They will know that I am with you, that you are My sheep and that I am your God."

A Prophecy Against Edom

35 The Lord spoke to me again and said, "Ezekiel, set your face against the mountains of Esau. Tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'I will stretch out My hand against you and turn your cities into ruins. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

5-9. "You helped the Babylonians kill My people, the descendants of your brother, Jacob. I will send Nebuchadnezzar to punish you for your wickedness. I will bring destruction to your land and the sword of war to your country. Your troops will be killed, and their bodies will lie on the mountains and in the valleys.

10-11. "You claimed the land of Israel and Judah as yours, when you knew that I had given it to Jacob. I will repay you for your hatred of My people. Then they will know that I am the Lord when I punish you for what you have done.

12-13. "I heard the terrible things you said against My people. I knew the plans you made to take advantage of the weakness of My people after they were defeated by the king of Babylon. I heard you speak boastfully against Me, telling others what you would do.

14-15. "I will bring about your downfall, and the nations will be happy that I have done so. Because you were happy over the downfall of your brother, Jacob, the nations will be happy over your downfall. Your country will become a wasteland. Then you will know that I am the Lord."

God's Blessing on Israel

36 Then the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, write down this prophecy, and tell the mountains of your homeland that this is what the Lord says: 'Your enemies had their day of joy. They prided themselves in taking your land, destroying your cities and making you the laughingstock of nations.

5-7. "'I will discipline those nations, especially the land of Edom. They laughed at your downfall and plundered your cities. I am jealous for Judah because she is Mine. The nations have insulted her. Therefore, they will pay for what they have done.

8-11. "'I will bless the land of Judah. Trees will grow and bear fruit. It will be ready for them when they come back home. The land will be plowed, and crops will be planted. I will bring My people home and bless them. They will rebuild their cities. I will multiply their flocks and herds; I will prosper them more than before.

12-15. "'Their children will no longer starve. What the nations have said about Israel will no longer be true. My people will not have to listen to others making fun of them. I, the Lord, have spoken.'"

16-19. The Lord spoke to me again, saying, "Ezekiel, when My people lived at home, they defiled the land with their wickedness. I disciplined them because of their violence and their worship of idols. I judged them according to their deeds.

20-21. "Wherever they went, their presence dishonored Me. Those who knew them said, 'These are the people who turned against their own God. They were so wicked that they were forced to leave their own land.' I was concerned about what the nations thought about Me because of you.

22-25. "Therefore, tell My people that this is what the Lord says: 'I will take you out of the nations where you now live and bring you back home. I will do this for your sake and Mine. I will restore the honor of My name through you. I will bring you back and wash away your sins. Your idols will be gone, and you will be clean.

26-28. "'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of love and obedience. I will give you the Holy Spirit, and He will help you keep My commandments. You will live in your own land again. You will be My people, and I will be your God.

29-32. "'I will bless your land with bountiful harvests. I will increase the yield of your fruit trees and the crops of your fields. You will no longer go begging. You will forget your wicked ways and hate yourself for hurting Me. Yes, you need to be ashamed of what you did.

33-35. "'After I cleanse you from your sins, I will bless you. You will rebuild your cities and farm your land. Your country will no longer look like a wilderness. Those who pass by will say, 'This place is beautiful! It looks like the Garden of Eden. The cities have been rebuilt. Look at how prosperous they are!'

36-38. "'The nations will know that I am the one who destroyed the cities of Judah and rebuilt them. In those days I will listen to the prayers of My people and bless them. Their cities will be as full of people as Jerusalem is during her festivals. Then everyone will know that I am the Lord.'"

The Valley of Dry Bones

37 The Lord gave me a vision, and the Holy Spirit took me to a valley full of bones. I

saw the bones of men killed in battle, and they were very dry. The Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, do you think these bones can live again?" I said, "Lord, You're the only one who knows."

4-6. Then He said to me, "Talk to these bones and say, 'You dry bones, listen! This is what the Lord says: "My breath will come into you, and you will live. I will put muscles on you and cover you with skin. I will tell your lungs to start breathing, and you will live again."' And they will. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

7-8. I did as I was told and heard a rattling sound. I looked and saw the bones starting to come together, bone connecting with bone. Then I saw muscles and skin cover them. But they were still dead.

9-10. Then the Lord said, "Ezekiel, say to these lifeless bodies, "This is what the Lord says: "Let breath come into those bodies so that they can live."' And they will." I did as I was told, and breath came into those bodies; and they stood to their feet, a huge army.

11. The Lord said, "Ezekiel, the bones that you saw in vision represent the bones of Israel. My people keep telling themselves that there is no hope for them because of the punishment they received.

12-14. "Tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'Listen to Me, My people. The time is coming when I will bring you back from captivity. The time is also coming when I will open the graves and raise the dead. When this happens, you will know that I am the Lord and that I will do what I say I will do.'"

15-19. Later the Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, take two sticks. On one, write the name of Judah, and on the other, the name of Israel. Hold the two sticks together so that they look like one. When the people ask you

what that means, tell them that this is what the Lord says: 'I will bring the kingdom of Judah and Israel together, and they will be one again.'

20-21. "Then hold the two sticks up high and tell them that this is My promise: 'I will take My people from the nations where I have scattered them and bring them back home.

22-23. "'They will become one nation again, with one King ruling over them. Never again will they be divided. They will not worship idols. I will deliver them from the power of sin and heal their backsliding. I will purify them, and they will be My people, and I will be their God.

24-26. "'My Son will be over them, and there will be one flock and one Shepherd. They will keep My commandments and be a happy people. They will live in the land of their ancestors, and My Servant will care for them. I will renew My covenant with them, and their numbers will not decrease.

27-28. "'I will live with them and be their God, and they will be My people. My Temple will be there, and it will stand forever. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord and that I am the one who set My people apart and made them holy.'"

The Wicked Prince

38 Then the Lord spoke to me about His people at the end of time. He said, "Ezekiel, prophesy against the prince of the wicked people who, like other nations, are ready for war. Write down this message and say that this is what the Lord says: 'I am against you and all those who love war.

4-6. "'I will turn you and your whole army around. I will put hooks in your jaws and drag you away, including

your horses and chariots and men of war. I will also do this to the troops you hired from other nations that support you.

7-9. "Go ahead, get ready for battle. After you feel that everything's ready, you will invade the land that has recovered from war, whose people live in peace. You will overshadow the land and attack My people like a storm.

10-13. "You will say to yourself, 'I will invade the peaceful land and plunder its cities.' Then other nations will say, 'Will you plunder our cities too? Will you take away our silver and gold? Or have you come to trade with us?'

14-17. "When My people are living in peace, then you will decide to attack. You will come down from the north with a huge army made up of many nations. You will come against My people like a storm. But I will show the nations that support you that I am the Lord by what I do to you. You are the one I spoke about in prophecy a long time ago.

18-21. "When you attack My people, I will destroy you. I will send an earthquake through the land. The whole world will tremble at My presence, people and animals alike. Mountains will fall, and cliffs will crumble. I will bring calamities on you from every side. Your people will even attack each other.

22-23. "I will bring plagues, storms, hail, and fire against you and the nations that support you. I will show the world My greatness and bring honor to My name. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

More About the Wicked Prince

39 The Lord continued: "Ezekiel, prophesy against the wicked prince and tell him that this is what the Lord says: 'I am against you

and those who are inclined to war. I will let you come against My people from the north. Then I will knock the bows and arrows out of your hands.

4-6. "You and your army and the troops from other nations who support you will die on the mountains. The birds and wild animals will eat their bodies. I will send fire on the coastlands, on those who are so proud. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

7-8. "I will make Myself known to My people, and they will bring honor to My name. I will not let My name be disgraced among the nations. They will know that I am the Holy One of Israel. That day is coming; it will happen. The Lord has told you so.

9-10. "My people will go out and pick up your bows and arrows, your clubs and shields, and use them for firewood. They won't have to cut down trees for a long time because of the huge amount of weapons they will pick up.

11-13. "On that day I will bury you in the land of My people, in the valley of the Dead Sea. Visitors will not want to go there anymore. It will take the people of Israel a long time to bury all of you. It will be a day never to be forgotten. I, the Lord, have spoken.

14-16. "I will send men throughout the land to make sure all the bodies have been buried. If only bones are left, they too will be buried. As the men go through the country they will put a marker where they find bones, and the gravediggers will come and finish the job. The valley will be called the City of the Dead. And the land will be clean again.

17-20. "Call the birds and animals together. Let them come to the feast on the mountains that I will prepare for them. They will eat the bodies of mighty men and princes. They will eat

the bodies of horses, riders, and men of war. They will eat until they're full. I, the Lord, have spoken.

21-24. "I will show the nations My glory and let them see My power. Israel will know that I am the Lord. The nations will know that Israel went into captivity because of her wickedness, and not because I was too weak to protect them. I dealt with them according to their sins. That's why I let this happen.

25-26. "But I will bring My people back home, and I will bless their land. I will have mercy on them and protect My reputation. They will live in safety, and no one will threaten them or make them afraid. I will forgive them, and they will forget all about their captivity and shame.

27-29. "When I bring My people back from where I scattered them, then the nations will see My power and know that I am the Lord. They will know that I was the one who let My people be taken into exile, and I was the one who brought them back. Never again will I turn against My people. I will pour out the Holy Spirit on all those who love Me."

A New Temple and City

40 In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, about fourteen years after Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed, I had a vision. The Lord showed me what His plan for Jerusalem and His Temple was. He took me to a high mountain, and I saw in front of me a new city.

34. Then I saw a man whose body looked like shining bronze standing by the gate of the city. He had a measuring rod in his hand. He said, "Ezekiel, pay close attention to what I'm going to show you. When the

vision is over, I want you to tell your fellow exiles what you have seen."

5. I looked, and saw a new Temple. Now, the man's measuring rod was about twelve feet long, one cubit and a handbreadth. He took his rod and measured the Temple wall. It was twelve feet high and twelve feet thick. The Temple itself was 1,000 feet on each side, making a perfect square.

6-10. Then we went up seven steps, and he measured the eastern gate. It was twenty feet wide and twelve feet high. On the other side of the gate there was a checkpoint with three guardrooms. Each one was twelve feet by twelve feet—a perfect square.

11-19. There was a porch with columns. It was sixteen feet wide and 120 feet long. The distance from the outside steps to the court was 100 feet. The walls all around were beautifully decorated. From one end to the other the outer court measured 200 feet.

20-27. Then the man measured the northern gate, and it was the same as the eastern gate, also beautifully decorated. The same thing was true with the southern gate.

28-31. Next, the man took me to the inner court, the courtyard of the sanctuary, where the sacrificial altar stood. There were eight steps leading up to the inner court. The courtyard itself was 100 feet long and fifty feet wide. The entryway had carved palm trees and was beautifully decorated.

32-37. Then he took me to the entrances on the east and north and measured them. They were the same as the southern entrance, through which we had just come.

38-43. By the northern entrance there were two rooms with tables inside and out in the open. That's where the priests sacrificed animals before putting them on the altar.

44-46. On the eastern end of the courtyard were two rooms for priests. One room was for those in charge of the sanctuary, and the other was for those in charge of the altar.

47. The courtyard with the rooms and entryway measured 200 by 200 feet. The sacrificial altar stood in the middle of the courtyard.

48-49. Then the man took me into the Holy Place. The entrance was twenty feet wide. There were ten steps going from the court to the entrance of the Holy Place, with two pillars at the top of the stairway.

The New Sanctuary

41 The Holy Place itself measured eighty feet long and forty feet wide. Then the man took me to the Most Holy Place. The entrance was twelve feet wide, and the room itself was forty feet by forty feet—a perfect square. While the whole Temple was God's house, the Most Holy Place was where His presence was.

5-12. Then the man measured the wall of the sanctuary. It was twelve feet thick. On the outside of the two side walls were three levels of apartments, thirty on each level. These were for the priests while they took turns working at the sanctuary. There was also a building at the back wall of the sanctuary in which to keep supplies.

13-20. The sanctuary with the entryways measured 200 feet by 200 feet—a perfect square. The entryways to the Holy and Most Holy had wood paneling with carvings of palm trees and angels. Each angel had two faces, one of a man looking one way and the other of a lion looking the opposite way.

21-25. The altar of incense in the Holy Place had steps. It was six feet high and four feet square. The two sets of

double doors, one set going into the Holy Place and the other into the Most Holy Place, were also decorated with carved palm trees and angels, just as the entryway was.

26. The walkway around the sanctuary had recessed windows and paneling up to the ceiling, also with carvings of palm trees.

Apartments for Priests

42 Then the man measured the apartment building on the north side of the sanctuary, where the priests stayed. It was 200 feet long and 100 feet wide with three levels. The front faced the sanctuary, and the back faced the outer court of the Temple. These apartments had a balcony walkway with a protected entrance. The apartment building on the south side measured the same.

13-14. The man said, "These apartments are for priests who come to take their turns helping with the sacrifices. Once a priest leaves his apartment to go to work, he is not to go back to the courtyard of the Temple, where the people are. He is to go directly to the sanctuary courtyard."

15-20. When the man finished measuring the inside of the Temple with its sanctuary, he took me through the eastern gate, where we had first come in. Then he measured the outside of the Temple. It was 1,000 feet on all four sides—a perfect square.

The Lord's Plan

43 Then the man brought me inside through the eastern gate. From there I saw the dazzling light of the Lord's presence coming from the east toward the Temple. He spoke, and His voice sounded like a mighty waterfall. The earth was bright with His glory.

3-4. This was like what I had seen in my vision by the river years before. I threw myself onto the ground as the Lord came through the eastern gate into the Temple.

5. Then the Holy Spirit picked me up and took me to the courtyard in front of the Holy Place, and the glory of the Lord filled the sanctuary.

6-7. Then the Lord spoke to me from the Most Holy Place, saying, "Ezekiel, this is the place of My throne. The earth belongs to Me. I will live here and be with My people forever. Never again will they dishonor My name by worshiping idols or dead heroes to whom they have built monuments.

8-9. "Their kings built their palace right up against the Temple. They came into the inner court, where only the priests are supposed to come, and set up their idols next to My altar. That's why I had to remove your kings. There will be an end of such evil. I will live among My people and be their God, and they will be Mine forever.

10-12. "Now go and tell your fellow exiles about My plan for a new Temple so that they'll repent and be ashamed of their lack of faith. Tell them about the Temple and everything you saw. Then make a drawing of it so they can see what it will look like. The Temple will sit on top of the mountain, and the whole area will be holy."

13-14. Then the man with the rod measured the altar of sacrifice. He used the same rod He measured the Temple with. The altar of sacrifice was built with three eight-foot-high sections, one on top of the other.

15-17. The top of the altar measured twenty-four feet by twenty-four feet—a perfect square with little horns on each corner. This is where the sacrifices were burned. The next section down was four feet larger, and the

lower section four feet larger still.

18-21. Then the Lord said, "Ezekiel, I want you to bring a young male calf as a sin offering to the priests. You're a priest, so take some of its blood and go to the top of the altar and put some on each of the four little horns. Also, put some on the corners of the middle section. Then take the body of the calf and burn it outside the Temple.

22-24. "Tomorrow I want you to bring a young male goat and do the same thing. After that, offer a young male calf and a young male sheep. The priests will burn them on the altar for you.

25-27. "You should do this every day for one whole week. This is to purify the altar and dedicate it for daily use. On the eighth day the priests can begin offering the sacrifices of the people. I will love My people. They will be Mine. I, the Lord, have spoken."

Rules of Worship

44 The man with the measuring rod brought me back to the eastern gate, but it was locked. The Lord said to me, "Ezekiel, this gate will stay closed. People will not be allowed to come in this way because that's the way I came in.

3. "The king can come and sit by the gateway to eat his sacred meal while facing the Temple. But if he wants to come inside, he has to come in one of the other gates, just as the people do."

4. Then the man took me outside the Temple through the northern gate. From there I could see the dazzling light of the Lord's presence filling the Temple. I threw myself onto the ground, as I had done before.

5-7. The Lord spoke and said, "Ezekiel, pay close attention to what you see and hear, especially the rules of worship. Notice who can go in and out of the Temple. Then tell your fel-

low exiles that this is what the Lord says: 'Enough is enough. You will not bring idols into My Temple again. You disobeyed and broke My covenant.

8-9. "'Also, you put foreigners in charge of My sanctuary and paid them to do what you were supposed to do. Foreigners not part of My people are not to come into My Temple, much less serve there.

10-12. "'The Levites are especially guilty because they too worshiped idols. They were assigned to work at the sanctuary to help people with their offerings. But they brought idols into the Temple and worshiped them even while serving Me. By their example they made the people sin and are therefore held responsible.

13-14. "'They will no longer be allowed to serve as priests, to sacrifice at My altar, or to come into the sanctuary. They will bear the shame of what they have done. But I will let them do other things for My Temple that have to be done.

15-19. "'Those priests who were faithful will be allowed to come into My sanctuary to offer sacrifices. They should wear the linen garments of priests, not things made of wool because it will cause them to sweat. Before they go into the outer court to meet the people, they should change back to ordinary clothes, because the priestly clothes are holy.

20-22. "'The priests are not to shave their heads or let their hair grow long, but keep it neatly trimmed. They are not to drink wine or anything containing alcohol. They are not to marry ordinary widows or divorced women, but only a woman who has not been married or who is the widow of a priest.

23-24. "'They are to teach the people the difference between what is holy and what is not. When a legal prob-

lem comes up, they are also to serve as judges. They are to keep My laws and My commandments, My Sabbath, and the religious festivals.

25-27. "'They are not to touch a dead body unless it's someone from their immediate family. If a priest does so without thinking, he must go through the ritual of purification, and wait a week before serving again at the sanctuary. Then the first thing he should do is to bring a sin offering for himself.

28-31. "'The priests are not to own property or have a business. Their inheritance is the priesthood. They will be supported by the tithes and offerings the people bring. Priests must not eat the meat of a bird or animal that died or that was attacked and killed."

The Sacred District

45 The Lord continued: "The country is to be divided according to tribes. Each one is to have its own tribal area. In the middle of the country there should be a sacred section of land for the Levites, the priests, and the Temple. It should be ten miles long and ten miles wide—a perfect square.

36. "My Temple will be 1,000 feet long and 1,000 feet wide with a 100-foot open space around it. It will be just north of the city. The rest of the district will belong to the priests and Levites for them to raise their families. The city will be two miles long and two miles wide, with open land for gardens and farms extending out on both sides.

7-8. "A ten-mile-wide strip of land on each side of the sacred district will belong to the king. Together they will extend across the country from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River. The rest of the country will be divided among the tribes."

9. Then the Lord said, "You kings of Israel and Judah will no longer oppress My people. From now on you will do what's right and will not force people off their land so you can have it.

10-12. "You are to see to it that My people are honest in business, using scales and measurements that are right. Your currency should have the same value everywhere."

Offerings and Festivals

13-17. The Lord continued: "The people should give the king grains and fruits from their harvests, and shall take animals from their flocks and herds to the sanctuary as a national offering. This way everyone will have a part, and it will remind them that they are one nation. It will be the responsibility of the king to see that this is done at all the religious festivals.

18. "On the first day of the first month I want the king to bring to the sanctuary a male calf as a sin offering. This marks a new year and a new beginning.

19-20. "The priest should sacrifice the calf and put some of the blood on the four corners of the altar and on the doorposts of the Holy Place. He should do the same thing a week later. This is the ritual for keeping the sanctuary holy.

21-24. "That same month the king and the people should keep the Passover, together with the Festival of Bread that follows. Each day for that week seven young male calves, seven young male sheep, and one male goat should be offered together with grain and olive oil.

25. "In the seventh month the king and the people should keep the Festival of Shelters, also called the Festival of Tents. It too lasts one week. The daily offerings should be the same as for the Festival of Bread.

These are national festivals and offerings to help keep the nation together."

Worship

46 The Lord continued: "The east gate into the sanctuary should be opened only on Sabbath. When the king comes to worship, he should stop at the gate and watch the priests sacrifice his offerings. He is not to come into the courtyard. After he leaves, the gate should be closed again.

3. "When the people come to worship, they should stay in the Temple courtyard. They can come up to the steps leading into the sanctuary, but no farther.

4-5. "For Sabbath worship, the king should bring six male lambs and one male sheep. Along with the male sheep he should bring grain and olive oil.

6-8. "For the Festival of the New Moon he should bring one young male calf, six lambs, and one male sheep, together with grain and olive oil. He should come to the gate of the sanctuary and watch the priests sacrifice his offerings. He should leave the way he came.

9-10. "When the people come into the court of the Temple through the north gate, they must go out through the south gate. If they come in through the south gate, they must go out through the north gate. If the king comes in with the people, he must do the same, because he's one of them.

11-12. "When the people bring a young male calf or a male sheep as a sacrifice, they should bring grain and olive oil with it. When the king brings a special offering, the east gate of the sanctuary should be opened for him, no matter what day of the week it is. He should watch the priests sacrifice his offering, and then the gate should be closed.

13-15. "Every morning the priests should offer a one-year-old lamb with grain and olive oil. This is the daily morning offering, and should be done without fail."

Laws of Inheritance

16-17. The Lord continued: "If the king gives a piece of land to his son, it will always belong to that son. If the king gives a piece of land to someone who works for him, it will belong to that person until the year of freedom. Then it will go back to the king.

18. "That's the same rule for all property. It always goes back to the original owner. The king must not take property away from the people to give to his sons. He is to give them property only from his own land."

19-20. Then the man with the measuring rod took me to the priests' apartments. He pointed to a kitchen at the end of the building where the priests should cook their food and boil their meat. He said, "This way nothing holy has to leave the sanctuary compound."

21-24. Then he brought me back to the Temple courtyard. In each corner was a smaller court with a fireplace. The man said, "Here is where the Levites should cook the meat of the sacrifices people bring."

Living Waters

47 The man with the measuring rod took me back to the east gate of the sanctuary. In vision I saw water bubbling up from the edge of the sacrificial altar. The water flowed to the east, the same way the Temple faced.

2. Then he took me back to the Temple courtyard, out through the north gate, and around to the outside of the eastern gate. There I saw

a little stream coming out from under the Temple.

3-4. He measured off 2,000 feet downstream from the Temple. Then he led me across, and the water came up to my ankles. Next, he measured off another 2,000 feet downstream and led me across, and the water came up to my knees. He measured off another 2,000 feet downstream and led me across, and the water came up to my waist.

5-6. He measured off another 2,000 feet downstream and led me across, and the water was too deep to walk across. It was deep enough to swim in. So he led me back out of the water to the bank of the river.

7-9. Then I noticed that there were many trees on both sides of the river. The man said to me, "The river flows east toward the Jordan Valley and on into the Dead Sea. Wherever it goes, it makes waters fresh and clean. It will be full of fish, and animals will come there to drink. The river will bring life to everything.

10-12. "Even along the edge of the Dead Sea fishermen will spread their nets, for the sea will be full of fish. And the marshes farther out will produce the salt that people need. Fruit trees will grow on both sides of the river. They will never die, but will produce fruit every month, and their leaves will be used for healing."

National Borders

13-14. Then the Lord said, "Ezekiel, let Me tell you how the land should be divided. The tribe of Levi gets no land, because they work for Me at the sanctuary. The tribe of Joseph will get two shares, one for each son—Manasseh and Ephraim. The rest of the land should be divided equally.

15-20. "The western border of the country will begin at the Mediter-

ranean Sea. To the north it will go to the border of Syria. On the east it will go to the Jordan River. And to the south it will go to the river of Egypt.

21-23. "The land should be divided according to the tribes. It will be their permanent possession. Foreigners coming to live in your country should be allowed to become citizens. They should be given a share of the land in whatever tribal area they choose to settle. I, the Lord, have spoken."

The Land Divided

48 The Lord continued: "Each tribe is to have a slice of land clear across the country. Beginning in the north and coming south, the first tribe will be Dan, then Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Reuben. Judah will be in the middle of the country.

8-23. "Then there will be the sacred district for the Temple, the city, and the land for use by the priests and Levites. The king's land will be on both

sides of the sacred district, as I described to you before.

24-29. "Going on south, the first tribe will be Benjamin, then Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, and Gad. There will be seven tribes to the north of Jerusalem, and five to the south. This is how the land should be divided. It will belong to Israel and will be their inheritance. I, the Lord, have spoken."

Jerusalem

30-34. The Lord continued: "The city will have twelve gates, three on each side, named after the tribes of Israel. The gates to the north will be Reuben, Judah, and Levi. The gates to the east will be Joseph, Benjamin, and Dan. The gates to the south will be Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulun. The gates to the west will be Dan, Asher, and Naphtali.

35. "The city will be two miles on each side—a perfect square. From then on, Jerusalem will be called by the Hebrew name, THE LORD LIVES HERE."

Daniel

INTRODUCTION: *This book was written by the prophet Daniel. He was taken captive as a teenager when the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem the first time in 605 B.C. The king made him go to school and learn about Babylon. When he finished, he served in the government of Babylon and Persia for about seventy years. The first half of the book tells about Daniel and his three friends. The second half of the book talks about the future. From Daniel's prophecies we learn that God is in charge of history. We learn about such nations as Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. And we learn about the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, and the end of the world.*

Daniel and His Friends

1 The Lord let Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, capture Jerusalem and take away the treasures of the Temple. Before leaving for Babylon, the king told his general to bring with him some of the sacred objects, as well as some captives.

3-5. After they got to Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar told his chief official to pick from the captives young men in their teens, intelligent, self-disciplined, and well-mannered. They were to learn the language and culture of Babylon and to be served the same food the king ate. After three years the king himself would examine them.

6-7. Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, all came from the tribe of Judah. But the king changed their names to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

8. Though Daniel was given a Babylonian name, he determined to be loyal to God. He also decided not to eat the unclean food they were given, which included pork and wine. So he asked the chief official if he could have a Jewish diet.

9-10. The chief official was kind to Daniel. He said, "The king himself has chosen the food you men should have.

If he sees that you're not as healthy as the others and learns that I changed your diet, he'll have me killed."

11-14. So Daniel went to their guardian and said, "Test us for ten days on a Jewish diet. Just give us fruits, grains, nuts, vegetables, and water. Then see if we don't look healthier and do better than the other students. After that, whatever you decide, we'll do." Their guardian agreed.

15-16. After ten days Daniel and his three friends were healthier and stronger than the others. So their guardian let them stay on their Jewish diet.

17-19. Then Daniel and his friends studied hard, and God helped them. He also gave Daniel the gift of interpreting visions and dreams. When their three years of training were over, they were taken to the king for examination. The four of them did better than all the rest. The king was so impressed that he took a real interest in them.

20-21. Whatever question the king asked, he found that Daniel and his three friends did ten times better than the other students. So Daniel worked at the palace for many years, until Cyrus, the Persian, conquered Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

2 A while later the king had a dream that really bothered him. So he called in his advisers—those who study astrology, who claim they can talk to the dead, and who say they can tell the future. He asked them to tell him his dream and what it meant. They said, “Your Majesty, tell us the dream first, and we’ll tell you what it means.”

5-6. The king replied, “The dream was awful, but I can’t remember it. That’s why I need your help. I want you to tell me the dream and what it means. If you don’t, I’ll have all of you killed and will turn your houses into garbage heaps. If you do, I’ll give you a big reward and special honors. So tell me the dream and what it means.”

7-9. They stammered, “Your Majesty, we need to know the dream before we can tell you what it means.” The king retorted, “Are you telling me you don’t know what I dreamed? You claim to know everything! This is one way to find out if you really do or if you’re just telling me what I like to hear. So you’d better tell me my dream and what it means—right now!”

10-11. The advisers got really scared and said, “Your Majesty, no king asks his advisers to do what you’re asking us to do. It’s impossible! No one except the gods can know what you dreamed.”

12-13. This made the king really angry, so he ordered that all his advisers be killed. Then the palace guards went through the city to round up all the other advisers, including Daniel and his friends.

14-16. Daniel asked the captain of the guard, “Why is the king so upset with his advisers? That’s not like him.” The captain told Daniel what had happened. Then Daniel went to see the king. He promised Nebuchadnezzar

that he would have an answer for him the next day.

17-19. The king agreed. So Daniel went to see his three friends and told them what had happened. He said, “We need to pray for God to help us, or we’ll all be killed.” They prayed a long time. That night God gave Daniel the dream and its meaning. Then Daniel thanked God, saying,

20-22. “Praise God forever and ever. All wisdom and power are His. He controls everything. He removes kings and rulers and also puts them in charge. He gives wisdom and understanding to those who know Him. He reveals mysteries, and floods the world with light and knowledge.

23. “O Lord, You are my God. Thank You for giving me courage to see the king yesterday, and for giving me the dream and telling me what it means.”

Daniel Explains the Dream

24-26. The first thing in the morning, Daniel went to the captain of the guard and said, “You don’t have to carry out the king’s command. I’m ready to tell the king his dream and its meaning.” So the captain took Daniel to the king and said, “Your Majesty, I have found one of the Hebrews who can tell you your dream and interpret it.” The king asked Daniel, “Can you do it for me?”

27. Daniel answered, “Your Majesty, no man can do what the king is asking, not even those who study the stars, who claim to talk with the dead, or say they know the future.

28. “But God knows everything, and He can tell you the dream and what it means. He gave you the dream to let you know what’s coming. First, I will tell you the dream, so that you can depend on the interpretation.

29-30. “Before you went to sleep, you

were worried about the future of your kingdom. So God showed you what will happen right up to the end of the world. I know this, not because I know the future, but because last night God gave me the same dream and told me what it means. He did this for you.

31-33. "In the dream you saw a huge statue of a man. It was brilliant and frightening to look at. Its head was made of gold, its chest and arms of silver, its waist and hips of brass, its legs of iron, and its feet part of iron and part of clay.

34-35. "While you were looking, you saw a huge stone come flying at the statue, hitting it on its feet. The whole statue collapsed. The huge stone rolled over the statue and turned it into powder. Then a strong wind blew it all away. Next, you saw the stone get bigger and bigger, until it became a mountain filling the whole world.

36-38. "This is what you dreamed, Your Majesty. Now let me tell you what it means. God has made you king of Babylon and has given you a powerful army. Your kingdom is this head of gold.

39. "But another kingdom will replace yours. It won't be as good as yours, just as silver is not as good as gold. That kingdom will be replaced by another one. It too will not be as good, even though it will be much bigger.

40-43. "The fourth kingdom will be as strong as iron and will crush anything that stands in its way. But it will split into ten little kingdoms. Some will be strong and others weak. Sometimes they'll work together and sometimes they won't. The children of these kings will marry each other to help unite the kingdoms, but it won't work.

44-45. "Then the time will come when God will destroy all the kingdoms of

the world. He will set up His own kingdom, and it will last forever. The huge stone you saw that hit the statue and turned it into powder is what God will do to all kingdoms. This is the dream, Your Majesty, and its meaning."

46-47. Nebuchadnezzar got up from his throne, bowed to Daniel, and then ordered that sacrifices be offered to Daniel's God. The king said, "Your God is above all gods. He is the only one who knows the future. That's why you could tell me my dream and its meaning."

48-49. So the king promoted Daniel and rewarded him for what he had done. He also put him in charge of all his advisers and the city of Babylon. At Daniel's request the king made his three friends his assistants.

The Golden Image

3 But Nebuchadnezzar gradually changed. He thought about how great he was instead of thinking about God. He had a huge statue built, all of gold, to show that his kingdom would stand forever. The statue was more than 100 feet high. He had it set up just outside the city.

2. Then he ordered all his officials who were not away on business to come and join in the festivities. They all came—princes, governors, judges, treasurers, advisers, police chiefs, and many others.

3-6. After everyone was there, they were asked to stand and face the golden statue. The royal announcer called out, "When you hear the sound of the trumpet, fall on your knees, bow your head to the ground, and worship the statue the king has made. Anyone who doesn't do this will be thrown into a blazing furnace."

7. As soon as they heard the sound of the trumpet, the people fell on their

knees, bowed their heads to the ground, and worshiped the golden statue.

Daniel's Three Friends

8-12. When Daniel's friends didn't kneel and worship the statue, it gave some of the advisers the chance they were looking for. They went and said to the king, "Your Majesty, you told us to kneel and worship the statue, and that anyone who didn't would be killed. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego didn't bow. They never worship our gods."

13-14. Then Nebuchadnezzar ordered his guards to go and get Daniel's friends. When they came, he said, "Is it true that you didn't bow down and worship the statue I set up?" They answered, "Yes, Your Majesty."

15. The king said, "I'll give you one more chance. When you hear the sound of the trumpet, I want you to kneel and worship the golden statue. If you don't, I will have you thrown into a blazing furnace."

16-18. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "Your Majesty, we've already made up our minds not to bow to an idol. If that's being disloyal to Babylon, what can we say? Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fire, if that's what He wants to do. But if not, we will still not worship any other god, nor bow down to this statue."

19-23. When Nebuchadnezzar heard that, he really got angry and ordered the furnace to be made seven times hotter. Then he had the three Hebrews tied up and thrown in. The guards who did it got too close to the furnace, and the fire killed them. So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, tied hand and foot, fell into the fire.

24-25. As Nebuchadnezzar was watching, he suddenly jumped up and said

to his advisers, "Didn't we throw three men into the fire, tied hand and foot?" They said, "Yes, Your Majesty." He said, "But I see four men walking around in the fire! The fourth one looks like the Son of God the Hebrews told me about."

26-27. The king went closer and called the young men to come out. When they did, the Son of God disappeared. Then everybody examined the three men who had been thrown into the fire and had come out alive. They had no burn marks, their hair wasn't singed, and there wasn't even the smell of smoke on their clothes.

28-29. The king said, "Praise the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who sent His Son to save those who love Him. They were willing to die for Him rather than worship the statue I made. Therefore, I order that anyone who talks against the God of these three men will be torn to pieces, and his house will be turned into a garbage heap. There is no god like their God."

30. Then Nebuchadnezzar promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and gave them even more authority and responsibility.

The King's Second Dream

4 I, Nebuchadnezzar, am writing this chapter. I had an experience recently that really convinced me that Daniel's God is the true God. I wrote down this experience and sent it throughout the kingdom and to all the nations I have conquered. Here it is:

2-3. I thought it would be good for you to know what the God of heaven has done for me. How good He is! His kingdom will never end. He rules from generation to generation.

4-5. A little more than seven years ago, while resting in my palace, I thought about everything I had done

for Babylon. I was quite proud of myself. Then I fell asleep and had a dream that frightened me.

6-7. So I called in my advisers to tell me what it meant. These are men who study the stars, claim to talk with the dead, and say they know the future. I told them the dream, but they couldn't tell me what it meant.

8-9. Finally, Daniel came to the palace. God's Spirit lives in this man. I said to him, "I know that God helps you to interpret dreams and tells you things that are secret. Let me tell you the dream I had, and you tell me what it means."

10-12. "In my dream I saw a huge tree, larger than any tree I had ever seen. As I looked, it grew even bigger, until it seemed to touch the sky. Everyone could see it. It had beautiful leaves and was loaded with fruit. Animals rested in its shade, and birds built nests on its branches."

13-15. "Then I saw a Holy Watcher come down from heaven. He said to those with Him, 'Cut down this tree. Cut off its branches. Scatter its fruit. Then drive the animals and birds away. But leave the stump in the ground and put an iron band around it. Let it get wet with the morning dew."

16-17. "'Take away the reason of a man for seven years, and let him think he's an animal. God has decided to do this so that people will know that He's in charge. He removes kings and sets them up.'

18. "This was my dream. Now tell me what it means. None of my advisers could do it. But I know that God can help you to interpret it for me."

Daniel Explains the Dream

19. Daniel just stood there. He was quiet for a long time. Finally I said, "If it's bad news, don't worry about it. Just tell me what the dream means."

Then Daniel said, "Your Majesty, the meaning of the dream is something your enemies would love to hear."

20-22. "The tree that was so big that it seemed to touch the sky, that was loaded with fruit, and that all the animals and birds loved represents you, Your Majesty. You have grown to be a very powerful king, and your influence is felt everywhere."

23-24. "The Holy Watcher that you saw never sleeps. What He said about you, Your Majesty, was a decision that the God of heaven has made."

25. "Your reasoning will be taken from you, and you will live like an animal. You will eat grass like the cattle and will sleep with them in the fields. This will last for seven years, until you finally learn that God is in charge and that He can give your kingdom to whomever He wants."

26. "But just as the tree stump was left unhurt, so God will return your reasoning and put you back on the throne. But only after you admit that God rules the whole world."

27. "This is the meaning of the dream, Your Majesty. May I suggest that you put away your sins, do what is right, be merciful and kind to others, and take care of the poor. If you do this, God may change His plans."

The King Responds

28-30. About a year later as I was walking in the palace roof garden, I looked over the city and said, "What a beautiful sight! I'm the one who did all this. I also put the country on its feet and made it into a great empire. Yes, I did all this, and Babylon will be a monument to me forever."

31-32. The words had hardly left my mouth when a voice from heaven said, "King Nebuchadnezzar, your kingdom has just been taken from

you. Your reasoning will fail, and you will eat grass with the animals in the field for seven years until you learn that God rules the world."

33. Just like that, my reasoning was gone. My advisers could tell that something was wrong. So they put me out with the animals. I ate grass and slept in the field. My hair grew long, and my fingernails grew until they looked like claws.

34. This lasted for seven years. I knew what was going on but could do nothing about it. Then suddenly my reasoning came back. I stood to my feet, looked up, and praised the God of heaven who lives forever and ever. His kingdom never ends.

35. Keeping up with everything that goes on in this world is not a problem to God. He rules the universe. No one can stop Him from doing what He does.

36. At the same time that my reasoning returned, my advisers came to see me. I went to the palace and got cleaned up, and they gave me back my kingdom. I had more power and glory than before.

37. So now I, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, praise the God of heaven and glorify the King of kings. His ways are always just and right. He humbles those who are full of pride.

Handwriting on the Wall

5 Some years after Nebuchadnezzar died, his grandson, Belshazzar, ruled with his father. He decided to have a big feast while his father was away. He invited 1,000 national leaders, and they all celebrated and drank into the night.

2-4. During the feast Belshazzar ordered the waiters to bring the large gold and silver cups that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. When the cups were

brought in, they filled them with wine and drank to the power of their gods and to the greatness of Babylon.

5-6. Suddenly a human hand appeared and began to write some words in large letters high up on the wall. The king and his guests watched in horror. His face paled, and his knees shook. Soon he was shaking all over.

7. When he found his voice, he called for his advisers to come and interpret the words. He said, "Whoever can tell me the meaning of those words shall have a gold chain of royalty put around his neck and be made a third ruler of Babylon, after my father and me."

8-9. The advisers looked at the words, but couldn't tell what they meant. Then the king became even more terrified and began to shake still more. His advisers were also afraid, because they didn't know what to do either.

10. When the queen mother heard that the celebration had suddenly stopped, she went to find out why. When she saw the words high up on the wall and noticed how terrified everyone was, she said to the king, "You don't have to be afraid."

11-12. "There is a man in Babylon named Daniel. He can interpret things like that. He did it for your grandfather. That's why he was made head of the king's advisers. He has a good mind and lots of wisdom, and can explain all kinds of mysteries. His name was changed to Belteshazzar. Call him. He'll tell you the meaning of the words."

Daniel Explains the Mystery

13-15. So the king called Daniel and asked, "Are you the one my grandfather Nebuchadnezzar brought here from Judah? They tell me that you can interpret dreams and explain mysteries. I asked my advisers to in-

interpret the writing on the wall, but they couldn't.

16. "If you can understand the writing, I want you to tell me what it means. If you do, I will put a gold chain of royalty around your neck and make you a third ruler in Babylon, after my father and me."

17-19. Daniel answered, "Your Majesty, you don't have to reward me. I'll read the writing and interpret it for you. The God of heaven made your grandfather king of Babylon and gave him riches and honor. Other countries trembled when he spoke. He would kill some people and honor others, and no one could stop him."

20-21. "But when he became proud, God took his reasoning away. He lived with the animals and ate grass like the cattle. For seven years he slept in the field, until he learned that God is in charge of everything and that He removes kings and sets them up."

22-23. "You knew all this, Your Majesty, but you became proud. You drank from the large golden cups taken from God's Temple. You praised your gods, which are nothing but wood and stone that can't see or hear. But the God of heaven knows everything. He holds your life in His hands."

24-28. "God sent you these words: Mene, Tekel, and Pharsin. The first word, given twice, means that God has numbered the days of your kingdom. The second means that God has not been pleased with you. The third means that God will give your kingdom to the Persians."

29. Then the king put a royal robe and a golden chain on Daniel's neck and announced that Daniel was the third ruler of Babylon, after his father and himself.

30-31. That same night the Persians slipped into the city, surprised the

guards, and killed the king. Then Darius became king.

Daniel in the Lions' Den

6 After Darius became king, he divided the country into 120 areas and appointed a governor over each area. Then he appointed three presidents, one being Daniel, and put each in charge of forty governors.

3. Daniel did such a good job that the king made him head of the other two presidents, and even considered putting him in charge of the whole country.

4-5. The other two presidents, as well as the governors, were jealous of Daniel. So they tried to find something wrong with him. But they couldn't. He was loyal to the king and faithful in all that he did. They said, "We'll have to find something against him, or soon the king will put him in charge of the whole country. It will have to be about his religion."

6-9. So they went to the king and said, "Your Majesty, there should be a test of loyalty for all your officials. Let us make a decree that for one month no one should go to any god or man for help except to you. Anyone who does will be thrown to the lions. We wrote out this thirty-day law, and all you need to do is sign it." The king liked the idea and signed it.

10-12. Even though Daniel knew about the decree, he continued his habit of praying to God three times a day with his window open toward Jerusalem. When these officials saw him praying, they went to the king and said, "Your Majesty, remember the test of loyalty? It says that no one should petition any god but you for thirty days." The king answered, "Yes, and once a decree is made and signed, it can't be changed."

13. Then they said, "Your Majesty, the man you made head of us has broken the law. Daniel asks his God for help three times a day with his window wide open."

14-15. When the king heard that, he was upset, because now he saw their trick to get rid of Daniel. The rest of the day he tried to think of a way out, but he couldn't. At sunset Daniel's enemies came and reminded the king what needed to be done.

16. So the king ordered his guards to bring Daniel to the palace. When he came, the king said, "Daniel, I have no choice but to throw you to the lions, because you broke the law. But I believe that your God who watches over you will save you."

17. Then the guards took Daniel to the lions' den, tied him up, and lowered him in. They rolled a big stone over the opening, and the king put his seal on it. Anyone who broke the seal would also be thrown to the lions.

18-20. The king was very sad. That night he didn't eat or sleep, because he kept thinking about Daniel. The first thing in the morning he went to the lions' den to see if God really had protected Daniel or not. When he got there, he cried out in a sad voice, "Daniel, are you there? Has your God protected you?"

21-23. Then Daniel called up to the king, "Your Majesty, may you live forever! My God has sent His angel to close the lions' mouths. Not one of them has hurt me. God knows that I am loyal to you." The king was overjoyed. He ordered the guards to lower a rope to pull Daniel up. When they examined him, they didn't find even a scratch on him.

24. Then the king ordered the men who had deceived him, and their families, to be thrown into the lions' den.

The lions were so hungry that they killed those people before they reached the bottom.

25-27. Next the king issued this public announcement: "Peace to the people. I'm making a decree that everyone in the country should respect the God of Daniel. He is the God of heaven and earth. His kingdom will never end. He saves all those who serve Him and does great wonders. He shut the lions' mouths and saved Daniel."

28. Then the king gave Daniel his position back, and Daniel continued to serve Darius, and also Cyrus.

The Vision of Four Animals

7 Before Babylon fell to the Persians, God had given me visions of the future and asked me to write down what I saw.

2-3. The first vision came at night while I was in bed. I saw an ocean with waves being whipped up by strong winds coming from all directions. Then four huge animals came out of the ocean, one after another.

4. The first was a lion with two large wings. Suddenly its wings were torn off, and it stood up on its hind legs. Then it stopped acting like a lion and acted more like a man.

5. The second animal was a bear. As it came out of the water, it walked with one shoulder higher than the other. It had three ribs in its mouth. It was told to kill and eat as much meat as it wanted.

6. The third animal was a leopard with four heads and four large wings. As it came out of the water, authority was given to it, and nothing could stand in its way.

7-8. The fourth animal was big and powerful. I couldn't tell what it was, but it was terrible. It had iron teeth and ten horns. Then I saw a little horn

come up and push three horns out of the way until they fell off. This little horn had human eyes and a man's mouth, which began to brag.

9. Then I saw what was taking place in heaven. First I saw thrones being set up. Then I saw God come and take His seat. His robe was as white as snow, and His hair was white like wool. His throne looked as if it were on fire. It also had blazing wheels.

10. Thousands and thousands of beings stood ready to serve Him. Then the court was seated, and the records were brought in.

11-12. While this was going on I could hear the little horn bragging about its power. Then I watched the huge animal until it was put to death and its body thrown into the fire. The other three animals had lived for a while but then disappeared.

13-14. Then the whole scene changed. I saw the Son of God riding on the clouds. He came to God the Father, also called the Ancient of Days. God gave Him kingly power and authority so that people from all nations, races, and languages would serve Him, and His kingdom would never end.

15-18. This vision really bothered me because I couldn't make sense out of it. I asked Gabriel to tell me what it meant. He said, "The four animals are four kingdoms that will come up one after another. But the kingdom of God's Son will be bigger than any of them and will last forever."

19-22. Then I asked him about the huge animal with ten horns, especially the little horn with human eyes and a man's mouth. Why did this little horn speak against God and make war against His people? And why did God let this go on until the heavenly court met and then begin to give the kingdom to His people?

23-24. Gabriel answered, "The huge animal represents a very powerful kingdom. It will follow the other three and crush anything that gets in its way. The ten horns are ten smaller kingdoms that later will rule the same territory. Then a little kingdom different from the others will come up. It will get rid of three of them to make room for itself.

25. "This little horn will act as if it's God on earth. It will think that it has a right to change God's law and the direction of history. It will persecute God's true people again and again for a long time.

26-27. "But the heavenly court will take away its power and destroy it. Then God's people will be given their own kingdom, which will cover the whole world. It will last forever and will be governed by God's Son. Everyone will love and obey Him."

28. There were a lot of things about this vision that were so scary that I felt sick. But I kept it all to myself.

The Vision of a Ram and Goat

8 About two years later I had another vision, which gave me more details. This vision came while I was doing the king's business in another city. I was walking by the Ulai River when God gave me this vision.

3-4. I saw a ram standing on the edge of the river. It had two large curved horns. It was powerful. Wherever it went—east, west, north, or south—no other animal could stop it. It did what it wanted and became very cruel.

5-8. Suddenly I saw a goat come charging out of the west. It had one large horn sticking straight out from between its eyes. It was going so fast that its feet were barely touching the ground. It headed straight for the ram, knocked it down, and killed it. Then the goat be-

came very proud. But soon its large horn broke off, and four smaller horns came up in its place.

9-10. Next the four winds blew, and out of one of them a horn appeared. It grew bigger than the other four. First it pointed south, then east, and finally toward the Holy Land. It grew so big and strong that it challenged the power of heaven and ruled over God's people.

11-12. It was so proud and bold that it stood up against the Son of God, the Prince of heaven, and later destroyed His Temple. Then I saw the horn change, and it attacked the truth about God. This horn prospered and grew more and more important.

13-14. Next I saw Gabriel and the Son of God talking together. Gabriel asked Him, "How long will all this last and the little horn be allowed to attack the truth about the heavenly sanctuary?" He answered, "God is very patient. He will wait for many days, but near the end the truth about the heavenly sanctuary will be restored."

15-16. Even though I heard this, I still didn't understand everything. So I asked Gabriel to help me. Then the Son of God said to him, "Gabriel, help Daniel understand the vision."

17. Then Gabriel came over to where I was. When he got close, I became scared and fell to my knees right beside the river, and bowed my head to the ground. He said, "Daniel, you don't have to understand everything. All you need to know is that the vision includes things from now until the end."

18-19. Then he touched me and helped me to my feet. He said, "I want you to know that in spite of all the future turmoil that you saw, God is still in control. The last part of the vision applies to the time of the end. So you don't have to worry about it.

20-22. "The ram that you saw is the kingdom of Persia, and the goat is the kingdom of Greece. The goat's horn represents its first king. After he dies, his kingdom will be divided and ruled by four lesser kings.

23-24. "But the kingdom will not hold together. Then another kingdom will take over. After that, a little king will come and claim to speak for heaven. He will control other countries and even make them fight for him.

25. "He will lie to get what he wants. He will think that he's great and will claim the power that belongs to the Son of God. But God will step in and destroy the little king.

26. "This vision covers many years. All you need to know is that it goes to the end of time, which is far into the future. But for now, keep the vision to yourself."

27. I was so overcome by what I saw that I was sick for days. Finally I was able to get back to work to carry on the king's business. But I kept thinking about this vision and really wanted to know more about what it meant.

Daniel Prays

9 In the first year after Babylon fell and Darius became king, I decided to study Jeremiah's prophecies to see if I could find some answers to what I had seen in vision. I wanted to know how much longer the Temple in Jerusalem would be in ruins.

3-4. I fasted and prayed. I confessed my sins and the sins of my people. I said, "O Lord, You are so great and powerful and yet so kind and gracious. You keep Your promises and are so merciful to us.

5-8. "We have sinned. We've been rebellious and turned from Your commandments. We didn't listen to Your prophets who gave Your messages

to our kings and people. So our country has been conquered, and our people have been taken captive. We have all sinned, including our kings and leaders.

9-12. "But, Lord, You are kind and gracious, always ready to forgive. We didn't listen to You. We broke Your law. Everything that Moses said would happen if we disobeyed has happened. Your word is true, and Moses was right. Jerusalem lies in ruins.

13-15. "We knew this would happen, but we didn't change our ways. We didn't ask You to help us change. We paid no attention to what You told us. You brought great honor to Your name when You brought us out of Egypt. But we behaved wickedly. What has happened to us is our own fault.

16. "Lord, please help us as You have done in the past. Don't let Jerusalem and Your Temple lie in ruins any longer. Don't let Your people continue to be made fun of.

17-18. "Please be kind to us and listen to my prayer. Do something for Jerusalem and Your Temple for Your name's sake. Both have been destroyed. Please do something, not because we're good, but because we know how kind and good You are.

19. "O Lord, forgive us our sins. Please don't put off taking us back home and restoring the city and the Temple. For Your name's sake, please don't wait any longer, because when people think of us, they think of You."

God Hears Daniel's Prayer

20-23. While I was praying, Gabriel came flying from heaven to help me. It was close to evening worship when he arrived. He said, "Daniel, I'm here to help you better understand the vision you had. As soon as you started praying, God asked me

to come back to help you. The captivity of your people in Babylon will end, just as God told Jeremiah it would. But let me tell you more about the vision you had.

24. "Seventy weeks have been given to your people to put an end to their wickedness, to accept God's plan of salvation, and to bring in righteousness. In this prophecy each day represents a year. The Messiah will come, and while He's here the sanctuary in heaven will be anointed and made ready for Him.

25-26. "From the time a Persian king issues a decree that Jerusalem be rebuilt until the Messiah comes will be seven and sixty-two such weeks. His ministry will last for three and a half years. In the middle of that seventieth week He will die, but not for Himself. Later Jerusalem will be attacked, and desolation will be everywhere.

27. "The Messiah will come to fulfill God's covenant. He will be crucified, and sacrifices in the Temple will stop. God will wait for another three and a half years for Israel to accept the gospel. But the leaders will turn against it. This will end the seventy-week prophecy. The Temple will be destroyed, and Israel, as God's special nation, will end."

Daniel's Next Vision

10 During the reign of Cyrus God gave me another vision. It too extended over many years and was hard to understand. But Gabriel came to help me.

2-4. The vision came after I had fasted and prayed for three weeks. I ate only plain food, ate nothing sweet, and drank only water. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month of the new year, as I was standing by the Tigris River, I suddenly had a vision.

5-6. In the distance I saw a man dressed in a white robe with a golden belt around his waist. His whole body radiated light. His face was as bright as lightning, and his eyes looked like lamps of fire. His arms and legs were as strong as polished brass. His voice sounded like a huge choir. I knew it was the Son of God.

7-9. I was the only one who saw this. Those who were with me didn't see anything, but were so overcome with fright that they ran away. I was alone but still in vision. My strength drained away, and I felt terribly weak. When I heard the Son of God speak, I fainted and went into a deep sleep with my face to the ground.

10-12. Gabriel took hold of me and set me on my hands and knees. He said, "Daniel, God loves you very much. Stand up and listen to what I have to say." I stood up but was still very weak. He said, "Don't be afraid. The first day that you started to fast and pray, your prayer was heard. That's why I've come to help you.

13-14. "The reason I couldn't come right away was that for three weeks the king of Persia refused to cooperate. Then Michael, God's Son and Prince, came to help. Now that the king's problem has been solved, I can help you. So let me give you more details about the vision you had that has to do with the future of your people."

15-17. While he was talking to me, I stood there looking down at the ground, unable to say a thing. Then Gabriel, who had the form of a man, touched my lips so that I could talk. I whispered, "I'm sorry that I'm so weak. But I can hardly breathe."

18-19. He touched me again, and my strength came back. "Don't be afraid," he said. "God loves you. May the peace of heaven be with you. Take

heart and be strong." Then I felt stronger. I said, "Thank you. Now I can concentrate on what you're saying."

20-21. He said, "I have come to help you understand more of the vision you had, but I have to hurry back to the king of Persia and later work with the king of Greece. What I'm going to tell you is true. No one is helping me with these kings except Michael, the Prince of heaven."

Gabriel Explains

11 Gabriel continued: "As soon as Babylon fell and Darius became king, I was sent to help him. Now Cyrus is king. After him, three less powerful kings will follow. The fourth king will be strong and attack the kingdom of Greece.

3-4. "The young king of Greece will defeat the Persians and take over other countries. His kingdom will be huge. But the young king will suddenly die, and his kingdom will be divided into four parts, each one ruled by one of his generals.

5. "One of these generals will rule the area to the south, including Egypt, and be called the king of the south. Another general will rule the area to the north, including Syria, and be called the king of the north.

6-16. "There will be war between these two kings off and on for some time. The daughter of the king of Egypt will try to bring peace, but it won't work. The king of Syria will come against your people, and no one will be able to stop him.

17. "Then the king of Rome will invade the land of Palestine and force the king of Syria to give it up. He will also tell the king of Egypt what to do and form an alliance through marriage, but his wife will work against him.

18-19. "The king of Rome will then turn

his attention to the coastlands in the north. He will have many victories and then return home. But one of his friends will turn against him and kill him.

20-22. "The next king of Rome will issue a decree that everyone in his kingdom should be taxed, including those in Palestine. His rule will be one of peace. After him an even stronger king will take over. He will have a huge army, and no one will dare to stand in his way. It will be during his rule that the Son of God will be killed.

23-27. "This king will make treaties with other nations and lay plans to overthrow the most fortified cities. But it will last for only a short time. He will come against the king of the south, who will fight back but be defeated. These two kings will sit down to talk to each other, but their lies will not do either of them any good.

28. "The king of Rome will then go back to his country with much wealth. He will turn against the people of the covenant and carry out his plans against them.

29-31. "Later a king who will accept the religion of God's people, unify the empire, and bring back its glory will take over. But he will compromise his faith and turn against those who are loyal to God.

32-35. "This will give rise to a different king. He will try to corrupt God's people with flattery, but they will refuse to listen to him. Many will die by the sword or be burned to death. But many more will be added, and their faith will grow stronger and stronger right up to the time of the end.

36-39. "This new king will speak as if he were God on earth. He will say things about God that are not right. God will let him do this, but for only an appointed time. This new king will elevate himself above all gods and fill his

house with gold, silver, and priceless treasures. He will attack strong cities by having others fight for him. He will honor those who honor him, and will put them in positions of authority.

40-41. "At the time of the end there will be another king. The king of the south will push at this new king of the north, and the king of the north will come against him with a huge army and many ships. He will sweep through countries like a flood. He will even enter the glorious land. Many will fall, but some will escape.

42-43. "His influence will extend to many countries, including Egypt. He will control much of the wealth of the world and be richer than the ancient Egyptians were.

44-45. "But the things he will hear from the east and the north will make him angry, and he will lash out in great fury. He will pitch his tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain. He will put himself between God and His people. But he will come to his end, and no one will help him."

The Time of the End

12 Gabriel continued: "During the end-time, Michael, God's great Prince, will complete His work in heaven and bring all things to a close. Just before the end there will be a great time of trouble. But God's people will be delivered.

2-3. "The righteous dead will be raised and will go to heaven. But the wicked will be raised to receive the shame of condemnation. Those who are spiritually wise will shine as bright as the morning sky; those who have helped others come to Jesus will shine as the stars forever and ever.

4. "Daniel, this is all you need to know. You can now stop writing and roll up your scroll. What you have

written will be sealed until the time of the end. Then it will be opened, and people will read it and understand. There will also be advances in knowledge and all kinds of travel."

5-6. Then the scene changed, and I saw the Son of God dressed in a white robe standing on one side of the river and Gabriel on the other side. Then Gabriel asked Him, "How long before the end comes?"

7. The Son of God raised both hands to heaven and took an oath in the name of the One who lives forever. He said, "These things will go on for only a set time. When the power of the one who tries to destroy God's people has been crushed, then the end will come."

8. I couldn't understand what everything meant. So I asked Gabriel, "Sir,

when will this long prophecy end?"

9-10. He said, "Some things concerning this prophecy will be sealed until the end. At that time God's people will be purified and made clean. But the wicked will keep on being wicked. They won't understand things, but those who are wise will."

11-12. "From the time when the truth about the heavenly sanctuary was first challenged until the time of the end will be many days. Blessed are those who wait for the Son of God to come to take them home."

13. "Go about your work, Daniel. You will soon rest in the grave. But what you have written will help God's people at the time of the end. When the Son of God comes, you will be resurrected and will receive your reward."

Hosea

INTRODUCTION: *The prophet Hosea wrote this book. Its messages of warning for Israel were not heeded; the people refused to change their wicked ways. As a result, God could no longer protect them. So the Assyrians came, took the people captive, and destroyed their country. Hosea's ministry covered about thirty years, from 753 to 723 B.C. His wife was not faithful to him, but he still loved her. From this we learn that even though Israel was unfaithful, God still loves His people.*

Hosea's Family

1 These are the messages the Lord gave to Hosea during the time of Hezekiah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, king of Israel.

2. The Lord said to Hosea, "Go ahead and marry the girl you say you love, but she's not a good girl. She's like her relatives, and your children will be just like them also. She will have boyfriends, even though she's married to you. That's what My people do to Me when they worship other gods."

3-5. So Hosea went ahead and married Gomer. They had a baby boy, and the Lord said, "Name him Jezreel. This means that I will punish Jehu for the innocent people he killed in the city of Jezreel. and I will break the military might of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

6-7. The next baby was a girl. The Lord said, "Name her Lo Ruhamah. This means that I have no more pity for the northern kingdom of Israel. But I will have pity for the southern kingdom of Judah. I will save them from their enemies, but not by using an army."

8-9. The third baby was a boy. The Lord said, "Name him Lo Ammi. This means that the northern kingdom of Israel is no longer Mine."

10. "But there will be so many who love Me that they will be like the

grains of sand on the beach. Even though I said, 'Some are not My people,' the day is coming when I will say, 'Here are My people.'

11. "The people from Israel and Judah will unite and be one again. They will choose Me as their leader and prosper in the land I gave them. And I will show My love for them."

Israel Is Unfaithful

2 The Lord also said to me, "The time is coming when I will be able to call your brothers and sisters in Israel 'God's People' and 'Loved by God.'"

2-3. "But for now I want you to plead with the people of the northern kingdom as earnestly as you would plead a case in court. Tell Israel that she is no longer like a wife to Me and that I am no longer her husband. Tell her not to be like women who sleep with other men. If she doesn't change, I will turn her country into a dry and thirsty land."

4-7. "I will not have mercy on Israel or on her children. She has loved Egypt and Assyria even though she was married to Me. I will hedge up her way so she won't be able to go to them. Finally she'll say, 'I think I'll go back to my husband.'"

8-10. "Israel never admitted that I was

the one who gave her food and clothes and made her wealthy. Yet she used My money to worship idols, especially Baal. So I will take back the good harvests and the food and clothes I gave her. I will let people see the kind of unfaithful wife she really is.

11-13. "I will put an end to her pagan worship on My Sabbath. I will destroy her vineyards and orchards that she says she got from the gods of the sun and rain. So I will let wild animals come and destroy her crops, and the land will become a wilderness. I will punish her for dressing up to worship Baal and acting as if I didn't exist.

God's Mercy

14-15. "I will take away all Israel's luxuries so that she will feel her need of Me. Then I will win her back with kindness and words of love. I will give her back her vineyards and orchards. I will offer her a door of hope, and she will respond with singing, as in the days when I brought her out of Egypt.

16-17. "She will call Me her beloved husband again and will not call Me her taskmaster. I will take the names of Baal and her other gods off her lips, and she will not speak of them again.

18-19. "In that day I will bless the animals and birds. I will put an end to war. My people will live in peace and safety. I will take Israel back as My wife, and she will be Mine forever. I will not have to turn away from her again, and she will accept Me as her Savior and Lord.

20-23. "I will bring the rain, and the earth will again produce rich harvests. I will bless My people. I will love those who were called 'Not Pitied.' I will say to those who were called 'Not My People,' 'You are My people.' They will say, 'You are our God.'"

Israel Will Come Back

3 Then the Lord said to me, "Go and find your wife and tell her that you love her, even though she left you for her boyfriends. Show her that you still love her just as I love Israel, even though they've done the same bad things."

2-3. So I went and found my wife, Gomer, and paid the man who she worked for to let her come back home with me. I told her that I would wait to see if she would be faithful to me, even if I had to wait a long time.

4. In one way this is the same with the people of Israel. God has waited a long time to see if they would come back to Him. They will go many days without a king to guide them and without answers from their gods. Then they will decide to return to God and love Him with all their hearts.

5. He will make the Descendant of David their rightful King. They will accept Him as their Lord, and He will bless them.

God Points Out Their Sins

4 The Lord has brought a charge against Israel. This is what He says: "There is no truthfulness or love anymore. People don't know Me. They curse, lie, steal, and commit murder. So I will send a famine in the land. People and animals will suffer; the birds and fish will feel it.

4-5. "Don't blame someone else for making you do these bad things. My complaint is against your priests and false prophets. I will put an end to you as a nation.

6-7. "My people are destroying themselves because they don't know Me. They reject the truth. My priests have rejected My commandments, so I have rejected them. The more priests I give you, the more you sin. I will turn

the glory of your priests into shame.

8-9. "So listen to Me, you priests. You're growing rich from the sin offerings My people bring. You're glad when they sin! You're leading them astray, and I will punish you for this.

10. "I will take away your plentiful crops. You will have little food and go hungry. I will do this because you have forsaken your God and turned to idols.

11-12. "Idol worship and all its pagan rituals are robbing you of your senses. Wine is clouding your understanding. You go to idols of wood for revelations of the future, but turn your backs on Me.

13-14. "On every hill you have shrines. Under every oak you have set up idols. Your pagan rituals have led your daughters into sin. You think that by increasing your pagan rituals, your gods will bless you and increase your crops. But you are destroying yourselves.

15-16. "While Israel to the north is unfaithful to Me, Judah to the south should be careful not to follow her example. They should not go north to Bethel and Gilgal to worship Me. Israel is like a stubborn calf. I will take her out to pasture and let her stand alone as a helpless lamb in an open field.

17-18. "The people of Ephraim love their idols. Leave them alone. There's nothing more I can do for them. After they have their wine, they go through their pagan rituals, and the priests love it.

19. "But soon an army will come in like a whirlwind and carry the people away to other lands. They will die in shame because of their idol worship."

A Prophecy

5 This is what the Lord says to the priests, leaders, and royal family of Israel: "You have been unjust, so judgment will fall on you. You have been like an evil trap that people fall into, like a net spread out to catch

them. Israel has lost her reason. I will punish her for what she has done.

3-4. "I know all about the tribe of Ephraim, the ringleader in all this. The whole country follows his example. The evil that people have done keeps them from coming back to Me. Their idols have gotten such a hold of their hearts that they no longer look to Me as their God.

5-6. "The pride of the people of Israel is a testimony against them. Judah is not much different. They bring lambs as sacrifices, but it does them no good, because I have turned the other way.

7. "They've taught their children to worship idols, so that now they're no longer My children. The people are bringing about their own destruction. Their enemies will come against them and destroy their country.

8-9. "Blow the trumpet! Raise the battle cry! War is coming from the north. Let this be a warning: The Assyrians will come. The tribe of Ephraim will be destroyed, and the northern kingdom will be no more.

10. "The princes of Judah to the south are like people who remove landmarks to steal property. I will punish them for taking what belongs to the people.

11-12. "Ephraim to the north will be crushed by his enemies because he's determined to worship idols. Israel will be eaten up by the coming war the way that a dead body is eaten by maggots. Unless Judah repents, she too will be punished for her sins.

13. "When Israel and Judah saw how sick they were, they turned to Assyria for help. But the king can not cure the nation's ills, nor can he heal wounds.

14-15. "I will be like a lion to Israel and a young lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces by letting their enemies come against them and carry them away. I will leave My people

until they confess their sins and come looking for Me, asking for help."

A Call for the People to Repent

6 When My people truly repent, they will say, "Come, let's return to the Lord. He has punished us, but He will save us. He has wounded us, but He will heal us. Our punishment will seem like only a few days, and then He'll restore us.

3. "Let's show that we love Him by obeying Him. Let's get to know Him better. He will shine on us like the sun. He will be to us like rain that ripens the harvest."

God Longs for His People

4. The Lord said to Israel and Judah, "What am I going to do with you? Your love for Me doesn't last. It's like the dew of night, which disappears when the sun comes out.

5-6. "I have sent My prophets to you again and again, telling you that My discipline is coming. My instructions were as clear as lightning in the sky. You know I wanted your love more than animal sacrifices.

7-8. "Like Adam, you have knowingly sinned and turned away from Me. Your cities are full of evil men whose hands are stained with the blood of innocent people.

9-11. "Your priests are like robbers who don't hesitate to kill. Worse than that, the people of Ephraim are totally immersed in idol worship and pagan rituals. Judah, too, will be punished if she continues her wickedness."

God Longs for Israel

7 The Lord says, "Whenever I think about healing My people, I see all the evil they're doing. They lie, steal, break into houses, and rob people on the street in broad daylight.

2-3. "The wicked don't stop to think that I can see what they're doing. I do, and I will not overlook it. Even the king delights in their wickedness, and his sons laugh when they hear what the people are doing.

4-7. "They're all burning with passion to do evil. On the king's birthday he and the princes got so drunk they made fools of themselves and applauded those who do evil. At night people plan evil, and in the morning they do it. They kill their own kings, and no one prays that I will stop it.

8-9. "My people are like a half-baked cake. They make agreements with foreign nations who are taking advantage of them. And they can't even see it. Israel is like an old man whose eyes are dim and whose days are numbered.

10. "The pride of the people testifies against them. But in spite of what has happened to them, they still don't call on Me for help.

11-12. "Israel is like a silly dove. It flits back and forth. First it flew to Egypt for help, then to Assyria. Next time Israel sends men to Egypt to ask for help, I will throw out My net and catch them like birds. I will punish Israel for all the wicked things she has done.

13. "The nation is doomed because she has left Me. She has rebelled against her own God. I long to save My people, but they only say bad things about Me.

14. "They don't pray to Me from their hearts, but throw themselves on the ground and wail like the heathen. They cut themselves in front of their gods and pray for big harvests. But they turn away from Me.

15-16. "Even though I trained them right and made them strong, they've turned against Me. They go to their gods for help. Israel is as unreliable as a faulty bow. Because they have

cursed My commandments, I will let the Assyrians come against them. Their leaders will be killed, and the Egyptians will laugh."

Israel Refuses to Change

8 The Lord says, "Sound the trumpet! The enemy is ready to swoop down on Israel like an eagle. They have rebelled against Me. They cry to Me for help and claim Me as their God. They believe they are My people, but they have rejected everything that's good. That's why I'm letting their enemies come against them.

4-6. "The people choose whomever they want as king. They appoint leaders without asking Me. They make idols and worship them. I hate these golden idols; they're making My people more and more wicked. How long will this go on? I will crush the golden calves their craftsmen make for them.

7. "They have planted a wind of wickedness, and they will harvest a whirlwind of evil. The reason their wheat is not growing is that I have held back the rain. Even if they had a good crop, I would let foreigners come in and eat it.

8-10. "Israel will be swallowed up by other nations. They're as worthless as a broken pot and as stubborn as a wild donkey. They have paid other nations to help them instead of coming to Me. I will punish them for their sins. Soon the mighty king of Assyria will come and invade their land.

11-12. "The people build more altars and bring more offerings, but they keep right on sinning. I had My prophets write down what My people needed to do, but they turned against it and said it didn't make sense.

13-14. "They offer sacrifices to Me to please Me, but I will not overlook their sins. I will punish them for their

wickedness and let them be taken away. They built fortresses to protect themselves, but they have forgotten their Protector. The people of Judah have also fortified their cities, but it will not protect them either."

Time for Punishment

9 People of Israel, stop rejoicing in your gods. You think your great harvests have come from your idol Baal, so you have turned away from God. Soon you will not have the grain and grapes you need. God will let your enemies come and take you away. You will be mistreated, just as your ancestors were in Egypt.

4. In the land where you will be taken there will be no Temple of the Lord. You will not be able to bring Him your offerings. You will cry over the unclean food they will give you to eat.

5-6. So what will you do? Even if you survive the attack of the Assyrians, the Egyptians will come and take you away. Weeds will cover your buried treasures, and thorns will overrun your houses.

7-9. The time for your punishment has come. You looked at God's prophets as mentally unstable. But the Lord sent them to you as watchmen to warn our people of their sins. You treated them as if they were your enemies, so the Lord will punish you as He did the Benjamites for their sins.

10. God says, "When I first took Israel to Myself, I rejoiced. It was like finding grapes in the desert. It was like seeing the first ripe figs on a fruit tree. But when they started worshiping idols, their behavior became as shameful as their gods.

11-12. "So Israel's glory will fly away like a bird. She will cry like a woman who can't have any more children. And I will let the children she does

have been taken away. I will abandon the northern kingdom, and it will be no more."

13-14. O Lord, to think that Israel was once so prosperous! Soon our country will be invaded. The Assyrians will come and show no mercy. Lord, don't let our women have any more children, because the little ones will be born only to suffer.

15-16. The Lord said, "Because of their wickedness I can no longer protect My people. Their leaders have rebelled against Me and, the people have stopped loving Me. Their nation will be taken, and many of them and their children will die in the war."

17. The God whom I serve will reject His people because they have rejected Him. Their enemies will take them away, and they will be wanderers among the nations.

Israel's Captivity

10 Israel was like a prosperous vine loaded with fruit. But the more money people had, the more pagan altars they built. The more productive their country, the more they spent on idols. They will have to suffer the consequences of their sins. And the Lord will destroy all their gods and altars.

3-4. After the Assyrians invade the land, the people will say, "The Lord took away our king because of our sins. But what good is a king if he can't save us?" Kings make promises, but never keep them. Contracts are broken, and lawsuits are springing up like weeds in a field.

5-6. The people have more respect for the golden calf than for the Lord. But soon the people and their priests will weep over their idol god because it will be gone. It will be taken to Assyria as a symbol of victory. Israel

will be disgraced and ashamed of the idol she loved so much.

7-8. Israel's king will be carried off and killed. The shrines and places of pagan worship will be destroyed. People will be so afraid that they will call for the mountains to fall on them and for the hills to cover them.

9-10. The Lord says, "The people keep on sinning, as the Benjamites did at Gibeah, and have not changed. So war will come and destroy their country. I will not overlook their terrible wickedness. I will punish them for their sins by letting their enemies come against them."

11. "Israel and Judah are like cows that enjoy eating their share of the rich harvests. I have not put a harness on them before, but now I will. I will hook them to a plow, and they will learn what it's like to work."

12-13. It's time for you to sow goodness and reap mercy. It's time to break up the hard soil of your hearts and seek the Lord until showers of blessings come. You have sown wickedness and reaped even more evil. You have trusted in your strong armies to keep your nation safe.

14-15. But war will come and destroy your fortresses. It will be like the time when the king of Assyria ruthlessly destroyed the city of Beth Arbel. That's what will happen to Bethel. And before the battle ends, the king of Israel will be killed.

God's Love for His People

11 The Lord said, "When Israel was a child, I loved him. I called him out of Egypt and brought him home. But the more I tried to help him, the more he turned away. Soon he was worshiping idols and offering sacrifices to Baal."

3-4. "I was the one who took Israel by

the hand and taught him to walk. But he didn't seem to know that I was the one who did this for him. I loved him as a son. I held him close to My cheek. I bent down and fed him.

5. "But My people have forgotten all that. Soon they will find themselves in the same situation they were in when they lived in Egypt. Assyria will invade their land and take them captive.

6-7. "War will sweep through their cities. Swords will flash in the streets. Neither old nor young will be spared. This will happen because they didn't listen to Me. Even if they cried to Me for help, I would not come and set them free.

8-9. "O Israel, O Ephraim, how can I give you up? How can I do this and turn you over to your enemies? How can I let you be destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah? My heart won't let Me. I love you. I am not doing this in anger. I have not forsaken you. I will continue to be merciful.

10-11. "Some of My people will come back to Me and accept Me as their God. Those who love Me will hurry back home. They will flock to Me like birds. I will settle them in their houses and comfort them with My love.

12. "Israel is full of lies. Judah still walks with Me, but is not totally faithful."

God's Concern for His People

12 The Lord continued: "Which-ever way the wind blows, that's the way Israel goes. She makes peace treaties with Assyria, then turns around and makes one with Egypt.

2. "I have a charge to bring against Judah. I want you to listen to Me. I will punish your sister Israel for her sins. The people will reap what they have sown. But I don't want you to follow their example.

3. "Remember how your ancestor

Jacob struggled with his twin brother, Esau, when they were being born? Even though he came out second, he ended up being first.

4. "Years later I spoke to him at Bethel when he was on his way to visit his uncle Laban, and I promised I would go with him. Then on his way back home he wrestled with what he thought was an angel and would not let go until I blessed him.

5-6. "I am the God of heaven and earth. I want you to come back to Me. I want you to be faithful and loyal again. I want you to be kind and just. And I want you to wait patiently for Me to act. I will come and save you.

7-8. "But your sister Israel can't be trusted. Their businessmen love to cheat and take advantage of others. Ephraim is the leading tribe. He says, 'I have become very wealthy, and have gotten this way by myself. No one can accuse me of sinning to get rich.'

9-11. "But I am the one who brought you out of Egypt. I will strip you of your wealth and make you live in tents again. I talked to you through My prophets. I gave them visions and dreams to help you, but you refused to listen. You turned to your gods and asked them to bless your fields.

12-13. "Judah, your ancestor Jacob worked for seven long years for Laban just so he could marry Rachel. Then he worked for him many more years after that. I did not forsake him, but brought him back home. Later I brought My people out of Egypt and guided them through My servant Moses.

14. "But the people of Israel have forced Me to discipline them. I will punish them for their sins, and for the disgrace they have brought on My name."

The Punishment of Israel

13 In the past, when the tribe of Ephraim spoke, the other tribes listened. They looked up to him. But he was attracted to idols such as Baal, and all Israel followed his example. Because of this, I will punish him.

2-3. Israel is getting worse. They're making more little golden calves and statues of Baal. Therefore, their nation will disappear like the morning dew, like smoke rising from a fire.

4-6. The Lord says, "I am the one who led you out of Egypt. Why do you worship other gods? They can't save you, but I can. I guided you through the wilderness and brought you into this good land. Then you became proud and forgot all about Me.

7-8. "So I will come at you like a lion. I will wait for you like a leopard along the path. I will come at you like a mother bear. I will rip you open and expose your heart.

9-11. "Your enemies will come and destroy you. Don't you know that I am your only help? Where is your king? Why can't he save you? Where are your leading men? Let them help you. You said, 'Give us a king.' And I did. But now I will take him away.

12-14. "Ephraim is influencing other tribes to do evil. The time of his judgment will come. Israel still has a chance to come back to Me, but the people refuse. They're like a baby that refuses to be born. Should I come and rescue Israel if they want to be left alone? I will neither have mercy on them nor force them to love Me.

15. "The tribe of Ephraim is growing quickly. But I will send a hot east wind and dry up the springs and the wells. I will let his enemies come and plunder the land.

16. "I will not protect their capital Samaria as I have. Neighboring nations will say, 'What happened to their God? Where is He? Can't He protect them?' Then Israel's enemies will come, and they will have no mercy."

Hosea's Last Plea

14 Israel, come back to God. Your sins have been your downfall. Return to the Lord. Let this be your prayer: "O God, forgive us our sins. Take us back, and we will praise You forever. We will offer You the fruit of our hearts.

3. "Assyria won't save us. Our horses and chariots can't protect us. We promise never to worship idols again. We know that we make them ourselves, and that they're not real. Lord, have mercy on us. We don't know where else to turn."

4. The Lord promises, "If My people confess their sins, I will forgive them and help them. I will love them and will not be displeased with them.

5-7. "My presence will be as refreshing as the morning dew. Israel will blossom like a lily. Like cedar trees she will send down her roots and stand tall. Like fruit trees in the spring she will come alive. She will live under My protection and flourish like a beautiful vineyard.

8. "Israel will forget her idols and turn to Me. I will answer her prayers and take care of her. I will be like an ever-green tree giving her shade against the sun. I will be a source of blessings to her, and she will be fruitful and prosper because of Me."

9. May those who are wise understand what is written and take it to heart. May they know God's will and His purpose for them. The paths of the Lord are right, and good people will walk in them. But the rebellious will stumble and fall.

Joel

INTRODUCTION: *This book was written by the prophet Joel. He prophesied during the early years of King Josiah of Judah, around 630 B.C. After a terrible swarm of locusts destroyed crops, Joel pleaded with people to turn from their wicked ways. If they didn't, God would let an army come against them like a swarm of locusts and destroy their land. But Joel also promised that after God punished them, He would answer their prayers and bless them again.*

The Land Laid Waste

1 The word of the Lord came to me to help Judah. So pay attention to what I have to say. All of you, listen to me. Has anything like this happened to us before? Tell your children about it. Pass it down from generation to generation.

4-5. Swarms of locusts have come and eaten our crops. What was left, the grasshoppers ate. So wake up! Weep and howl, you drunkards, because the grapes for making wine are gone!

6-7. I saw the locusts coming like a powerful army, too many to count. Their teeth are sharp and their jaws are like those of lions. They destroyed our vineyards and fruit trees. They even ate the bark, leaving the vines and branches white and bare.

8-10. Weep like a bride who hears that her bridegroom has been killed! All our crops are gone, even the first-fruit offerings for the Lord. The fields are bare, and the ground is hard and dry. There are no grapes, and all the olive oil is gone.

11-12. Weep, you who have farms. Cry, you who own vineyards. There is no harvest. The grapevines and fig trees are dying. Other fruit trees are already dead. Our joy of living is gone.

13-14. Weep, you priests; wail at the

altar. This is what the people should have done before. Go into the Temple and grieve all night. Put on clothes of mourning, because there will be no more offerings. Call a day of fasting and prayer. Gather the leaders. Fill the Temple with people, and cry to the Lord for help.

15-16. The day the Lord told us about has come. What an awful day it is! Destruction sweeps through the land. Our food has disappeared before our eyes. Joy has gone from our worship, and gladness from the house of God.

17-18. Seeds lie rotten in the ground. The storehouses of grain are empty. The cattle are in distress, wandering around looking for pasture. Our sheep suffer.

19-20. I cry out to You, O Lord, because our fields and trees have dried up, scorched by the sun. Even the wild animals cry out for food and water. The streams are dried up, and our forests are on fire.

The Day of the Lord

2 Sound the alarm! Blow the trumpet in Jerusalem! Blow it from the holy mountain. Let the people tremble, because the day of the Lord is coming.

2-5. It will be a day of darkness.

Swarms of locusts will come from across the mountains, like a mighty army. They will consume everything in their path. They look like galloping horses and sound like chariots of war as they eat their way across the hills and fields.

6-8. People will see them coming and will tremble. They will scale the walls like an army marching in line, never changing course. They don't get in each other's way. They will break through defenses without breaking rank. Nothing can stop them.

9-10. They'll crawl into houses like thieves, going through any opening they find. The ground seems to move wherever they go. The sun and moon will be darkened by their numbers, and the stars cannot be seen.

11. Like a plague of locusts, the Lord will also let an army come against Judah whose troops cannot be counted. They follow orders and move forward without hesitation. The day of the Lord is terrible. Who can stand it?

A Call to Repentance

12. The Lord says, "It is not too late. Come back to Me with all your heart. Confess your sins. Weep over what you have done."

13. The Lord does not want you simply to tear your robes to show that you repent, but to repent from your hearts. Come back to the Lord. He is gracious and kind, full of compassion and love.

14. Surely He is waiting to forgive us. If we change our ways, He will be merciful. He will heal our land and bless our crops. Then we can bring our first-fruit offerings to Him as we did before.

15-17. Blow the trumpet! Call a meeting! Announce a day of fasting and prayer. Call the people together, old and young. Call the bride and the

bridegroom. Let the priests weep and pray, "Spare us, O Lord! Be merciful to us! Don't let the nations make fun of us. Don't let them say, 'Where is this great God of yours?'"

God Hears and Answers

18-19. The Lord will pity His people and will say, "I have heard your prayers. I will be merciful and heal your land. I will give you back the grain and grapes the locusts have eaten. Once again you will have plenty. I will bless you. The nations will no longer make fun of you."

20. "I will remove the locusts from your land. The swarms in the front I will send into the Dead Sea, and the swarms in the back into the Mediterranean Sea. And I will send those who came from the north back home."

21-22. People, listen to me. The Lord will do wonderful things for you. So don't be afraid. Be glad and rejoice. Our fields will turn green again. The trees are budding again and will soon bear fruit. So also will the fig trees and the vines.

23-24. So let's be glad and rejoice. The Lord has given you the early rain to water the seed, and He will give you the latter rain to ripen the crops. Soon your barns will be full of wheat and your vats full of olive oil and grape juice again.

25-27. The Lord says, "I will restore what the locusts have eaten in the years they came into the land. Once again you will have plenty and eat to the full. You will thank Me and praise My name. No longer will the nations look down on you."

28-29. "Afterward I will send My Spirit on people of all ages. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. The Holy

Spirit will come on servants and on men and women alike.

30-32. "In the last days there will be signs in the heavens and on earth. There will be blood, fire, and billows of smoke. The sun will turn dark, and the moon will be as red as blood, before the coming of the Lord. All who call on Me will be saved. I will deliver My people. And the remnant will be those whom the Lord calls out of Babylon."

The Valley of Decision

3 The Lord said, "When the time comes, I will bring My people back from captivity and restore the prosperity of Judah. I will judge the surrounding nations for all that they have done to My people. They have scattered them everywhere. They cast lots for them and divided the land. They traded and sold boys and girls for a drink of wine.

4. "What do you nations have against Me? Why are you taking revenge on My people for something I supposedly did to you? If that's your excuse, I will pay you back for what you have done to them.

5-8. "You have taken the silver and gold from My Temple. You have taken My people and sold them as slaves to the Greeks and to others so they would be as far away from home as possible. But I will bring them back and will do to you what you have done to them. I will let your sons and daughters be taken and sold to the traders in Arabia. I, the Lord, have spoken."

9-10. Then the Lord said to me, "Send this message to the nations: 'Prepare for war! Call up the troops! Let them

get ready for battle. Beat your plowshares into swords. Let the weak say, 'I am strong!'"

11-13. "'Come together, all you nations. Come to the Valley of Judgment. I will meet you there for the harvest of the world. It will be time to squeeze the grapes until the vats are full. The evil of the world will have reached its limit.'"

14-15. In vision I saw multitudes in the Valley of Judgment. The day of the Lord had come when He would judge the world. In that day the sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars will not shine.

16. The Lord will roar like a lion. His voice will thunder from Jerusalem. The earth will quake, and the heavens will shake. But the Lord will be a refuge for His people, a stronghold and a sure defense for those who love Him.

The Lord Will Bless His People

17. The Lord said, "In that day My people will know that I am the Lord their God. I will live in Jerusalem, and the city will be holy. Armies will no longer attack, nor will hostile strangers walk her streets.

18. "The hills will be covered with vineyards and the fields filled with cattle. There will be enough food for everyone. A pure stream will flow from My Temple to water the land.

19-21. "Egypt will be desolate and Edom a wasteland because of their violence against My people. But Judah and Jerusalem will be inhabited. I will cleanse the land of blood and will come and live with My people."

Amos

INTRODUCTION: *The prophet Amos wrote this book. He was a shepherd when God called him to the ministry. He preached for about fifteen years, from 768 to 753 B.C. He warned Israel that God would punish them for their wickedness unless they repented. We learn that God does not like rich people being cruel to those who are helpless and poor. God loves people and wants everyone to be treated fairly. Also we learn that God holds a whole country responsible for what it does. Amos reminded the people that someday God would make Israel new again.*

God's Discipline

1 My name is Amos. I'm a shepherd from the town of Tekoa in Judah. I was given a message in vision two years before the earthquake.

2. This is what I saw and heard: The Lord's voice roared from His Temple in Jerusalem. Pastures dried up, and the grass on Mount Carmel turned brown.

3-5. The Lord said, "The Syrians have repeatedly and viciously attacked My people. I will hold back no longer. I will send fire on the palace built by their king and burn down the fortresses built by his son. I will break down the gates of Damascus. Syria will fall, and her people will be taken captive.

6-8. "The Philistines have also repeatedly attacked My people. I will not hold back any longer. They invaded the land and sold My people into slavery. I will send fire on the walls of their cities and burn down their fortresses. I will remove their rulers and will not stop until their people are taken away.

9-10. "The people of Tyre have mistreated My people. I will not hold back any longer. They invaded the land and sold My people into slavery. They completely ignored the peace treaty they had made with Israel. I

will send fire on the walls of Tyre and burn down her fortresses."

11-12. Then the Lord said, "The descendants of Esau have repeatedly attacked My people. I will not hold back any longer. They hunted them with the sword and had no compassion on the people of Jacob. Their rage had no limits. I will send fire on the walls of their cities and burn down their fortresses.

13. "The people of Ammon, who are Lot's descendants, also repeatedly attacked My people. They took away their land to expand their own borders. They were very cruel, even killing pregnant women. I will hold back no longer.

14-15. "I will send fire on their cities and burn down their fortresses. The war will rage, and shouts of attacking troops will be heard everywhere. The king and his officials will be taken."

God's Discipline Continues

2 The Lord continued: "The people of Moab, also descendants of Lot, repeatedly attacked My people. And they attacked the descendants of Esau. They invaded their land, dug up the bones of the king who was friendly to Israel, and burned them to ashes.

2-3. "I will send a fire on Moab and consume her fortresses. The trumpets of war will sound against her, and many of her people will be killed. The king and his officials will be no more."

4-5. The Lord spoke to me about Judah, saying, "My people have rejected My law and looked down on My commandments. They are worshipping the same gods their ancestors did. I will send fire on Judah and burn down her fortresses, including those in Jerusalem."

6. The Lord also spoke to me about Israel, saying, "The people continue to worship idols. They sell a good man for money and a poor man for a new pair of shoes."

7-8. "They deny justice to those who need it. A father and son marry the same woman. They sleep on blankets taken from the poor, and make wine from grapes taken from those who have no money."

9-11. "I have loved and protected Israel. I brought you out of Egypt, guided you through the wilderness, destroyed your enemies, and gave you the land of Canaan. I raised up prophets to guide you and chose some of your sons to do a special work for Me. This is true, and you know it."

12. "But you forgot what I've done for you. You forced the young men set apart for Me to drink wine and break their vow not to touch alcohol. You even commanded My prophets not to prophesy."

13-16. "I will break your willful spirit. Those who try to run from the war will find no place to hide. The strongest warrior will not be able to save himself. Your troops will retreat but not get away, and the horsemen will not get far. Even the bravest will drop his weapons."

The Prophet Speaks

3 People of Israel and Judah, listen to me. This is what the Lord says: "Of all people on earth, you are the ones I chose to be Mine, to witness for Me. This is what makes your sins so terrible, and why I must discipline you."
3-5. "Can two walk together unless they agree? Does a lion roar when he sees nothing to attack or has nothing to protect? Does a bird get caught in a trap if the trap has not been baited?"
6-8. "Does the trumpet of war sound without making people afraid? Does war come without the Lord allowing it? The Lord has never let anything happen to you without His prophets telling you ahead of time. When the Lord gives His prophet a message, who dares to change it?"

9-10. The Lord said to me, "Let My message be heard all along the coast and down to Egypt. Let them know the crimes that My people have committed against Me. The rich take what they want from the poor. They don't know what it is to be honest and to do what's right anymore."

11-12. "A nation will invade Israel, pull down her defenses, and carry away her treasures. As a shepherd can find only a few bones of a lamb left by the lion, so only a few of you will be left in Samaria after the war."

13-15. The Lord told me to listen carefully and to warn the people of Israel what is coming. He said, "I will punish Israel for her sins. I will destroy her pagan altars and the homes of the wealthy. Their summer and winter houses will be gone, and their rich living will come to an end."

Israel Refuses to Change

4 Listen to me, women of Samaria. Many of you are well taken care of and well fed. Yet you take ad-

vantage of the poor and the weak. You demand that your husbands give you whatever luxury you want, including expensive food and wine.

2-3. The Lord says, "The time will come when your enemies will invade the land and drag you through the broken city walls into captivity.

4-5. "Go to Bethel and worship your gods. You're determined to do it no matter what I say. Go ahead and bring Me your sacrifices and tithes. Go ahead and bring Me offerings and brag about it. But I know that you love your idols more than Me.

6-8. "I have disciplined you by withholding rain when your crops needed it most. But you didn't come back to Me. I let rain fall on one field and not on another so as to get your attention. But you never even asked Me why. People went from city to city looking for water. There wasn't enough to go around. But you didn't change your ways.

9-10. "I struck your gardens and vineyards with mildew. I sent locusts to eat your crops and strip your trees. But you still didn't come back to Me. I sent a sickness among you, and let your enemies come and kill some of your young men in battle. The smell of dead bodies filled the air. But you still would not return to Me.

11-12. "I let some of your cities be destroyed by fire, and your people barely escaped. But you still didn't come back to Me. Therefore, I will have to discipline you still more. Get ready to meet your God, O Israel, as He comes in judgment!"

13. Listen! The Lord made the mountains and created the wind. He changes day into night and tells us what He's thinking. He is the Lord of heaven and earth, the mighty, everlasting God.

A Final Call to Repent

5 Listen to this funeral chant I have written: "Israel has fallen, never more to rise. She lies abandoned in her own land. No one is there to help her."

3. The Lord says, "If you send out 1,000 troops to fight your enemies, only 100 will return. And if you send out 100 to fight, only ten will return.

4-5. "Come back to Me, and I will protect you. Don't keep going to your favorite cities to worship your idols. These cities will soon be reduced to rubble."

6-7. Listen to the Lord, and you will live. But if not, the Lord will let war break out against you. Your cities will be set on fire, and no one will put it out. You who have twisted justice and taken advantage of good people will be killed or be taken captive.

8-9. Search for the Lord, the one who made the stars. He turns darkness into light and day into night. He takes water from the oceans and brings rain on the land. The Lord is mighty and great. He destroys strongholds and brings fortified cities to ruin.

10-11. Listen to me! You hate those who tell the truth or dare to challenge you in court. You take advantage of the poor and keep raising their taxes. You have built beautiful mansions and planted lush vineyards for yourselves, but they will do you no good.

12-13. You are a very wicked people. You commit crimes, take bribes, persecute good people, and keep the poor from receiving justice. Good people keep quiet because there's nothing they can do.

14-15. When will you do good instead of evil? Change your ways, and the Lord will be with you. You say that He is with you, but He's not. You need to hate sin and love what's good. Bring justice back to your courts. It may be

that the Lord will have mercy on us and our children.

A Day of Darkness

16-17. The Lord says, "The time is coming when there will be weeping in the streets and on the farms. Mourners will wail because I will have passed through the land and taken away your possessions."

18. Woe to you who long for the day when the Lord will judge your enemies. It will not be a day of light for you either, but a day of darkness.

19-20. It will be like a man running from a lion who meets a bear. Or like a man who escapes disaster only to be bitten by a snake in his own house. The day you're looking for will not be a day of joy for you, but a day of sadness and gloom.

21-24. The Lord says, "I am not pleased with your religious festivals. I can't stand your worships. Even though you bring Me sacrifices and offerings, I will not accept them. Stop your songs of praise. They're only so much noise. I will not listen to your music. I want to see justice in your cities and goodness in your hearts."

25. "When your ancestors were traveling in the wilderness, did I require sacrifices and offerings from them before I would love and protect them?"

26-27. "You look to your idols for help and build shrines for them all over the country. What am I going to do with you? I will let your enemies come and take you to another land. I, the Lord, have spoken."

God's Last Warning

6 Woe to those who live in luxury, who feel secure and do nothing for others. Woe to you leaders who do nothing to bring justice to the people.

2-3. Look at what Assyria has done to other countries. Are you stronger than they? You keep telling yourself that no evil day will come on your country. But because of your continued wickedness, you're bringing it closer.

4-5. You sleep on luxurious beds and sit on gorgeous couches. You eat only the best foods. You write songs and strum on your harps, thinking that you're doing what David did.

6-7. You drink all the wine you want and use the finest perfumes, but are not concerned about your country going to ruin. You will be the first to go into exile, and your luxury and feasting will come to an end.

8-10. The Lord has taken an oath, saying, "I despise the pride in the hearts of My people and detest their beautiful mansions. I will turn their country over to their enemies. Even if ten men defend one house, they will all be killed. And when a relative comes to bury them, he'll be afraid that he might be the next one to die."

11-12. Listen, people. The Lord will let Israel's enemies come and crush the large houses and the small ones. Have you ever seen horses gallop on boulders or men plow water? Yet you're doing something even more weird. You pervert justice to execute the innocent and end up making honesty and righteousness something to be avoided.

13-14. You brag about the strength of your army and its little victories. But the Lord says, "I will bring a nation with armies against you that you cannot stop. They will invade your land and occupy it from one end to the other."

Vision of Locusts

7 In vision I saw the Lord getting ready to send an army of locusts on the land. This was just as the

second crop for the year was coming up. I saw them come and eat every green thing they could find. I cried out, "Lord, forgive Your people! This nation is so small that they won't survive!" Then the Lord said that He would wait.

Vision of Fire

4-6. After that I had another vision and saw the Lord getting ready to send fire on the land. I saw it come and burn up everything, even the water in the rivers and lakes. I cried out, "Lord! Please stop! This nation is so small that the people won't survive!" Then the Lord said that He would wait.

Vision of a Measuring Line

7. Then I had a third vision. In it I saw the Lord standing by a wall checking to see if it was straight.

8. He said to me, "Do you see what I have in My hand?" I said, "Yes, it's a measuring line." He said, "I'm going to use it to measure My people to see if they're straight. I want to show them that they're like a wall out of line. This time I will not wait."

9. "The places where they go to worship idols will be destroyed. Their cities will be left in ruins. Their nation will be no more."

The King Complains

10-11. When I gave the Lord's message to the people, the priest went and told the king about it. He said, "Amos is against you. He's stirring up the people. He's saying that war will come, that you'll be killed, and that our people will be taken into exile. He's destroying faith in you and in our country!"

12-13. Then the priest came back and said to me, "That's enough! Go back to Judah and prophesy there. Bethel is the king's place of worship. And his royal palace is here."

14-16. I said, "I'm neither a regular prophet nor the son of a prophet. I'm just a shepherd and a fruit picker. The Lord called me from my work and said, 'Go up north to Israel and prophesy against My people.' So you need to listen to what the Lord says and not tell me to stop prophesying."

17. "This is His message to you: 'Your wife will sleep with other men, and your children will be killed. Your property will be divided and given to others. Israel will be defeated and her people taken captive. You will be taken into exile, where you will die.'"

Vision of a Fruit Basket

8 Then I had another vision and saw a basket of fruit. The Lord said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" I said, "A basket of ripe fruit." The Lord said, "The time is also ripe for Me to discipline My people. Songs will turn to weeping. Bodies will cover the streets. Silence will hang over the city, and fear will grip the hearts of the people."

4-5. Listen to me, you who take advantage of the poor. Listen to me, you who say, "When will the Sabbath end so that we can do business?" You love to cheat and charge more than you should. You love to use false scales and measures and then congratulate yourselves on how smart you were.

6. You like to find a poor man who has lost his job, can't pay his bills, and doesn't even have a pair of sandals to wear. You help him get out of debt by buying him as a slave so that he can work for you for nothing.

7-10. The Lord says, "I will not overlook your evil deeds. War will come and make your nation tremble. The sun will go down at noon, and darkness will cover the land. You will put on clothes of mourning and shave your

heads to show your grief. You will weep as if you had lost your only son.

11-12. "I will send a famine in the land, not only of bread and water, but of hearing the word of the Lord. People will long for a prophet. They will go everywhere looking for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it.

13-14. "When war comes, young men and women will collapse in the streets from lack of water. Those who put their confidence in their idols and swear by this or that god will die in the war."

The End of Israel

9 Then I had another vision and saw the Lord standing by the altar in the Temple courtyard. He said to someone with Him, "Hit the pillars so hard that the whole Temple will shake. Then break off the tops of the columns and let the Temple collapse. Those who are not killed by the falling building will be killed by the sword.

2-4. "If they escape, I will let their enemies find them, no matter where they go. If they hide in the mountains, their enemies will hunt them down. If they could hide at the bottom of the sea, the water serpents would bite them. If they are taken to other countries, the sword of war will follow them. I will no longer protect them in their wickedness."

5-6. The Lord is very powerful. When He touches the earth, it begins to melt. At His presence the ground rises and falls like a river. His home is in heaven, but His feet touch the earth. He's everywhere. He takes the water from the oceans and to bring

rain on the land. He is the Lord!

7-8. The Lord says, "I value the people of Ethiopia as much as I value you. I brought you out of Egypt, but I also brought the Philistines and the Syrians here. I keep an eye on all nations, but especially on Israel. The time has come for Me to bring an end to Israel as a nation. But I will not let My people be totally destroyed.

9-10. "I will shake the people of Israel just as wheat is shaken in a sieve. I will let them be taken captive. When I do this, not one kernel of good wheat will fall to the ground and be lost. But the wicked among them will die in the war, because they keep saying, 'God is too good. He won't let anything happen to us.'"

The Kingdom Restored

11-12. The Lord continued: "The day is coming when I will restore David's kingdom. I will set it up as it was before. My people will possess the land, and people from other nations will come to learn about Me.

13. "The days are coming when the harvests will be so big that people will still be reaping when it's time to plow again. And there will be so many grapes that they'll ripen faster than people can pick them.

14-15. "I will bring back My people from captivity. They will rebuild their cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and orchards and gardens again. I will plant my people in their own land. Never again will they be uprooted and taken away. I, the Lord, have spoken."

Obadiah

INTRODUCTION: *This book was written by the prophet Obadiah. It was written about the time the Babylonians attacked Judah in 586 B.C. Obadiah says that God will punish the Edomites, who are related to the Hebrews, for helping the Babylonians and looting Jerusalem.*

A Prophecy

1. This is what I, Obadiah, saw in vision. This is what the Lord said to the country of Edom: "I have sent angel messengers to nearby nations urging them to go to war against you.

2-4. "I will make you a small nation, and you will be despised. Your pride has deceived you. Because your capital is built on a high mountain, you think that no one can defeat you. Even though you feel as though you're living with eagles and among the stars, I will bring you down.

5. "When thieves break into a house, they take only what they really want. When fruit pickers harvest grapes, a few are always left. But when your enemies come and attack you, nothing will be left.

6-7. "Even though you're the descendants of Esau, I will not protect you. Your country will be looted and your treasures taken. Those who joined you to attack Israel will now turn on you. They will set a trap for you, and you won't even know it until it's too late. Their armies will come, and they will drive you out of your own country.

8-9. "Your wise men will be killed. Those who live in the mountains will be taken away. Even your fighting

men who are known for their fearlessness will be terrified. Every soldier defending you will be killed.

10-11. "I will let this happen to you because you robbed and killed the descendants of your brother, Jacob. You will be covered with shame and be destroyed forever. You just stood and watched as enemies came and tore down the Temple gates and carried off its treasures. This is as bad as if you had been one of them.

12-13. "Why were you so happy over the misfortune of your brothers and sisters in Judah? Why did you laugh at them when they were marched away into captivity? Why did you go and loot their cities? Why did you gloat over their suffering? You took everything they had.

14. "You stood at the crossroads and killed those who were trying to escape. You caught others and handed them over to their enemies.

15. "The day of your judgment will soon come. As you have done, so it will be done to you. Your cruelty will return on your own head. The way you treated My people is the way you will be treated.

16. "At the end the Lord will judge all nations. They will be treated the way that they treated My people. But

those among the nations who died not knowing right from wrong will not suffer, but will be as if they had never been.

Israel Delivered

17-18. "Deliverance will come to Israel. My holy mountain will become a sacred place. My people will inherit the land that is rightfully theirs. And the country of

Esau will be like straw set on fire.

19-20. "People south of Judah will live in the mountains of Esau and possess the land of the Philistines. The exiles who were taken from Jerusalem will return and live in the cities of Judah again.

21. "Those saved will come to Mount Zion and will help govern the land. The Lord's kingdom will take in the whole world, and it will last forever."

Jonah

INTRODUCTION: *The prophet Jonah wrote this book around 790 B.C. God called Jonah to the ministry and asked him to go to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, to preach. Jonah disobeyed, but God forgave him and gave him a second chance. We learn that God loves all people, not just the Hebrews. When the people of Nineveh repented, He forgave them.*

Jonah Doesn't Listen

1 One day the Lord said to Jonah, "I want you to go to the city of Nineveh and tell the people that I know all about their wicked ways." Jonah didn't want to do that. So he went to Joppa to catch a ship going to Spain. He thought that if he ran away, the Lord wouldn't bother him anymore.

A Storm at Sea

4-5. Soon after the ship left, the Lord sent a big storm. It got so bad that the sailors thought the ship would sink. Each one prayed to his god for help. They also threw some of the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. Meanwhile Jonah had gone below deck to lie down, and had fallen sound asleep.

6. When the captain found him, he shook him and said, "How can you sleep when we're in such danger? Get up and pray to your God, as we're doing to ours. Maybe He's the one who can quiet the storm and save us."

7-8. But the storm didn't stop. Finally the sailors said, "Someone must be to blame for all this." So they drew lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. They said to him, "So you're the one to blame for all this! Who are

you, and where are you from? What's this all about?"

9-10. Jonah said, "I'm from the country of Israel, and I worship the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." Then he told them that he was running away from God and why. When the sailors heard that, they said, "Do you realize all the trouble and loss you've caused us by doing that?"

11-13. Meanwhile the storm got worse, and the sailors asked Jonah what they should do. He said, "Throw me overboard, and the storm will stop. All this is my fault." The sailors didn't want to do that. They tried hard to turn the ship around and go back home. But the storm got even worse, and it looked as though the ship was about to sink.

14. They cried out to God and said, "O Lord, please don't let us die because of this man. And don't punish us for throwing him overboard. Lord, You brought on this storm. So throwing this man overboard is Your doing, not ours."

15-16. Then they picked Jonah up and threw him overboard. As soon as they did that, the storm stopped, the waves died down, and the sea became calm. This made the sailors even more afraid of the powerful God of Jonah, and they promised to serve Him.

17. Now the Lord told a huge fish to come and swallow Jonah. And that's what it did. And Jonah was in the fish's stomach for three whole days and wasn't hurt.

Jonah's Prayer

2 From the stomach of the fish Jonah cried out, "Lord, save me!" As soon as he called for help, the Lord listened.

3-4. Jonah prayed, "Lord, You had me thrown into the sea. The mighty waves rolled over me. I thought it was my end. But I reached out to You in faith, hoping to see Your Temple again.

5-6. "The waters came over me; the sea was all around me. Seaweeds wrapped around my head, and I sank like a rock. I went past the mountains of the sea. There was no escape. But You sent this huge fish to rescue me. You heard me and brought me up from the deep.

7. "When my life was slipping away, I prayed, and You heard me. My voice reached Your sanctuary in heaven, and You saved me.

8-9. "Those who worship other gods don't know of Your kindness and grace. With gratitude in my heart, I take an oath of loyalty to You. You're the only one who can save us."

10. So the Lord told the huge fish to vomit Jonah onto the beach, and that's what it did.

Jonah Goes to Nineveh

3 Then the Lord spoke to Jonah a second time. He said, "Go to Nineveh and proclaim the message I will give you."

3-4. So Jonah went. Nineveh was a large city. The very first day Jonah began walking up and down the streets saying, "Forty more days, and Nineveh will be destroyed!" It didn't

take long for Jonah's message to spread throughout the city.

5-6. The people believed what God had said. They started to fast and pray. Everyone who heard the message repented of their sins. When the king heard about it, he took off his royal robes, put on mourning clothes, and also repented of his sins.

7-9. Then he issued this order: "No one—not even your animals—is to eat or drink for one whole day. Everyone is to fast and pray. Let them stop their violence and wicked ways. Maybe the God of heaven will be merciful and not destroy our city."

10. When God saw what had happened and how determined the people were to change, He had compassion on them. So He decided to spare the city.

Jonah Complains

4 When Jonah saw that the people had repented of their sins, he became angry. He knew that God would forgive them and not destroy their city.

2-3. So he complained to God. "Lord, I knew this would happen," he said. "That's why I ran away. I didn't want to deliver this message, because I know that You're kind, compassionate, and forgiving. I knew that if the people repented, You would be merciful, and I would look like a false prophet. I wish I were dead."

4. The Lord said, "Do you have a right to be upset because I forgave the people? You seem more interested in your reputation than in saving people."

5. Then Jonah decided to go outside the city and build a shelter to protect himself from the wind and to give himself some shade. He just sat there pouting, waiting to see what would happen. He still hoped that the Lord would destroy the city.

6-7. But Jonah had no protection from the noon sun. So the Lord made a vine to quickly grow up over Jonah's shelter during the night to shade his head. The next morning Jonah was amazed. He just loved that little vine. But the next day the Lord told a worm to eat the roots of the vine, and by noon the vine shriveled up and died.

8. When the sun got really hot, God also sent a hot east wind to blow on Jonah's shelter. With the sun beating on his head, and the hot wind blowing, Jonah was about to faint. He cried out, "Lord, I'm better off dead!"

9. The Lord said, "Do you have a right to be so upset because your little vine died? Jonah said, "Yes, I do. I'm upset about a lot of things. I'm so mad about all this that I really wish I would die!"

10-11. The Lord said, "You loved that little vine, even though you didn't make it grow. It sprang up overnight, but the next day it died, and you missed it. Wouldn't I miss the people of Nineveh if I had destroyed them? They don't know as much about Me as you do. And what about the animals? Why shouldn't I save this city?"

Micah

INTRODUCTION: *This book was written by the prophet Micah. His ministry covered about forty years, from 740 to 700 B.C. God was concerned about the injustice in Israel and Judah. The poor and the helpless were being mistreated. Micah tells people to turn back to God. Only if they were to repent and do what was right could they escape from being punished.*

Messages From the Lord

1 These are messages from the Lord that He gave to me about Samaria and Jerusalem.

2-5. Listen to me, people! The Lord has a word to say against you. Listen to Him! The Lord will come out of His holy place in heaven. The mountains will melt under His feet, and the valleys will split wide open. Why? Because the people of Samaria and Jerusalem are evil. And who is to blame for all this? They are!

6-7. The Lord says, "I will turn Samaria into a mound of ruins and pour her rubble into the valley. Her idols will be crushed, and her gifts to these gods will be destroyed by fire. Her wealth will be taken by her enemies, and her Temple workers will go without pay."

Micah Cries

8-9. When I heard this, I cried. I put on mourning clothes and walked barefoot. I howled as I cried. Samaria's wickedness is incurable, and she has passed it on to Jerusalem. Destruction waits at her gates.

10-13. Don't let our enemies see us crying. They will come and take our cities. Our people will be taken captive and marched into exile. There

will be no safety anywhere. Disaster will sweep across the land even to the gates of Jerusalem. Men will jump into their chariots to fight, but their defeat is sure.

14-16. The Lord will hand you over to your enemies. Those who are disloyal to the God of Israel will be destroyed. Those of you who glory in your possessions will be taken by your enemies. Your leaders will run and hide. Weep and mourn, for your children will be taken into another land.

Injustice

2 Woe to those who lie awake at night making plans to do evil. As soon as morning comes, they carry them out. When they want a man's property, they take it. When they want a man's house or his inheritance, they work out a way to get it. No one is safe from their greed and selfishness.

3-4. The Lord says, "I will bring disaster on you, and you will not be able to save yourself. It will be a time of trouble such as you've never seen. Your captors will pretend to be Hebrews and say: 'We are ruined. The Lord has given our land to our enemies. We have rebelled against God, and everyone knows

it.' Then they will turn and laugh."

5. Listen to me, people! Woe to those who deal unjustly with their neighbor. They will no longer have an inheritance in God's Israel.

False Prophets

6-7. The people say to me, "Don't tell us about what will happen. God is good. He won't let our enemies disgrace us." Let me ask you, Do you think God won't do what He needs to do? Do you think that He overlooks your wickedness? Won't He be kind to those who do what's right?

8-9. The Lord says, "You mistreat those who love Me. You strip the poor of everything they have, like soldiers looting their enemies. You force women out of their houses and rob their children of the land I have given them."

10-11. "It's time for you to be driven from the land. Your own wickedness has destroyed your country. If a false prophet told you good things in exchange for food and wine, you'd love him for it."

God's Love and Care

12. The Lord also says, "Yet I will bring you home from your captivity. I will gather all those who love Me. They will be like sheep coming home, and the land will be full of My people again."

13. Yes, the Lord will bring His people out of exile. They will walk through the gates where they are held, and go free. The Lord Himself will lead them back home.

Israel's Rulers

3 Listen, you leaders of Israel! Shouldn't you be concerned about justice? But you love wickedness. You take everything the people have. You break their backs with hard labor. You treat them like

meat that you chop up and cook.

4. The time is coming when you will cry out to the Lord for help. But He will not answer you. He will not listen to your prayers, because of the evil things that you have done.

5-7. This is what the Lord says: "My people are being deceived by false prophets who promise peace. They turn against those who refuse to go along with them. Their time is almost up. The sun will go down on their lives, and darkness will soon cover them. Their false visions and prophecies will become evident. They will be humbled and disgraced."

8. The Lord has given me courage to speak. He has shown me what is just and right and told me to point out the sins of the wicked.

9-10. So listen to me, you leaders of Israel! Listen to me, you who twist the law and pervert justice. You're building Jerusalem on a foundation of wickedness.

11. Your judges take bribes. Your priests misinterpret the law if you pay them. Your prophets predict good things in exchange for money. They all claim that the Lord is with them. They say, "The Lord is here. Nothing bad will happen to us."

12. Because of your wickedness Jerusalem will be reduced to rubble, the Temple will be destroyed, and God's holy mount will be a hill overgrown with thickets.

The Future of Israel

4 The Lord's future plan for Israel is for the mountain on which the Temple now sits to be the highest mountain of all. His plan is for people from everywhere to come and worship there.

2. Nations will say to each other, "Come, let's go up the mountain to

the Temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways so that we can walk in them." From Jerusalem the Lord will teach the people and speak to the nations of the world.

3-4. The Lord will settle disputes between nations, among the powerful near and far. They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into harvest tools. Nation will no longer fight against nation, and there will be no more war. Everyone will live in peace. Each man will have his own property, and no one will make him afraid.

5. Now each nation worships its own god. But we will continue to worship the Lord and obey Him forever.

God's People

6-8. The Lord says, "When that day comes, I will gather the lame, the exiled, and those who have had to suffer. I will make a new beginning with them, and they will become a great nation. I will be their king forever. I will restore the glory of Jerusalem, and she will be the capital of My kingdom.

9-10. "Why are you weeping? It's because your king has been taken captive, and no one is guiding the government. You thought you were secure by living in Jerusalem, but now you've been taken captive too. You will be forced to walk to Babylon. But the time will come when I will rescue you. I will redeem you from the grip of your enemy.

11-13. "Many nations are against you. They say, 'Jerusalem must be destroyed! Let's rejoice over her defeat and feast our eyes on her treasures.' But you will defeat them. They don't know what I have in mind. I will make My people as strong as a bull with iron horns. I

will reign from Jerusalem, and the nations will come and bring their wealth to Me."

The Messiah Will Come

5 Jerusalem! Our enemies are coming! They have come to capture our king and beat him with rods.

2. But the Lord says, "Bethlehem, even though you are one of the smallest towns in Judah, that's where the Messiah will be born. He is the real king of Israel and has existed from the days of eternity.

3. "For now, I will let your enemies come and take you captive. But the time will come when Israel will be delivered. Those in exile will come back to their own people.

4. "When the Messiah comes, He will take charge of His people as a shepherd takes charge of his sheep. He will rule in the strength of God, and His people will live without fear. He will rule the whole world, and there will be peace forever."

The Hope of Deliverance

5-6. When the king of Assyria comes and invades our land, the Lord will raise up leaders against him. They will crush our enemies. The Lord will save His people from those who attack our land.

7-9. Just as dew and rain come from the Lord and not from us, so the Lord will bless and refresh His people. They will live among the nations in the midst of many people. They will be as strong as lions. Those who attack them will be defeated. Everyone will know how strong they are.

10-12. The Lord says to the nations, "The time will come when I will take away your chariots of war. I will destroy your cities and tear down your walls of defense. I will put an end to

your witchcraft and magic. Your fortunetellers will be gone.

13-15. "I will destroy your images and idols and tear down their shrines. You will no longer bow down and worship them. I will judge all those who have turned against me."

Israel's Problems

6 Listen to what the Lord says! Listen to Him as He presents His case against Israel! Let the mountains and hills listen! The Lord has a case against His people.

3-4. The Lord says, "My people, what have I done to you? In what way have I been a burden to you? I brought you out of Egypt. I rescued you from slavery. I gave you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam as leaders.

5. "Remember when Balaam, the false prophet, tried to curse you, and I made him bless you? Remember how I opened the Jordan River so you could cross over on dry ground? Think back on these things so that you won't forget what I have done for you."

6-7. What should we bring to the Lord to show our gratitude for what He has done for us? What should we offer Him when we come to worship? Should we bring Him the best lambs and calves we have? Should we bring Him thousands of sheep and rivers of olive oil? Should we sacrifice our baby boys to Him?

8. No! The Lord has told us what is good and acceptable. It's to be just, to show mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.

Israel Warned

9-10. The Lord says, "Listen to Me and learn from My discipline. I know the wealth that is stored in the house of evil men. I know how they cheated others to get rich.

11-12. "Should I overlook all this? These men are ruthless. They take advantage of the poor and think nothing of it. They lie without hesitation. They can't be trusted.

13-14. "I will destroy your country because of your sins. I started punishing you by letting you get sick. You eat and fill your stomachs, but you still feel hungry. You save and save and still have nothing. What you do have will be destroyed in the coming war.

15-16. "You will plant, but there will be no harvest. You will pick grapes but have nothing to drink. You have listened to your wicked kings and followed their example. Therefore, I will bring your nation to ruin. People everywhere will look down on you and laugh."

Israel's Wickedness

7 I'm like a starving man who goes to the orchard looking for figs, but finds none. I'm like a man who goes to the vineyard for grapes, but they're all gone.

2. It seems as if all the good people have vanished too. Where are they? Where are those who are honest and loyal to the Lord? It seems as if everyone is waiting for another innocent victim, whether he's a fellow Israelite or not.

3-4. People are skilled in doing evil and committing crimes. Officials demand gifts before they'll do anything. Judges take bribes. The powerful take what they want. Even the best of them are like weeds and the most respected of them are like thorns. The time of punishment the prophets warned us about has come.

5-6. You can't trust your neighbor or put confidence in a friend. You even have to be careful, what you say to your wife. A son turns against his

father and a daughter against her mother. A man's enemies are those of his own family.

7. But as for me, I will keep my eyes on the Lord. I will have confidence in Him, for He will save me. He will hear my prayers and answer them.

God Is Israel's Light

8-9. Let not the nations rejoice over the fall of Israel. Though we have fallen, we will rise again. Though we are in darkness, the Lord will be our light. We have sinned, so now we must endure God's discipline. But it will last only a little while. The Lord will right the wrongs we have done and bring us into the light.

10. Our enemies will see His justice. We will see the downfall of those who laughed at us and said, "Where is their God?" They will be like mud in the streets.

11-13. People of Jerusalem, the day of our rebuilding will come. The Lord will extend our borders. People will come to Jerusalem from the north and the south, from across the oceans and from over the mountains. But before the full glory of Jerusalem comes, the whole earth

will become a wilderness because of people's wickedness.

Israel's Sins Forgiven

14. Lord, be a Shepherd to Your people. Guide us with your shepherd's rod. You have chosen us to be Yours. We feel like sheep alone in the woods, not knowing where to go. Lead us to rich pastures as You did our people years before.

15. The Lord said, "I will help you. I will work miracles and do great things for you as I did when I brought you out of Egypt."

16-17. The nations will see the hand of the Lord, and their power over us will be taken away. They will put their hands over their mouths and will say no more. They will come out of their dens and stand before God in fear and trembling.

18-20. Who is like our God? He forgives our sins. He does not discipline and punish forever. He delights in mercy. The Lord is full of compassion. He will throw our sins into the depths of the sea. He will be faithful and true to Israel. He will be merciful to the descendants of Abraham, just as He promised He would.

Nahum

INTRODUCTION: *The prophet Nahum wrote this book. He lived in Judah. His ministry covered about twenty-five years, from 665 to 640 B.C. Since the days of Jonah the people of Nineveh had become wicked again. Nahum prophesied that Nineveh would be taken by the Babylonians and that the Assyrian Empire would fall. Nahum assured the people of Judah that God would punish the enemies of His people.*

God's Message Against Assyria

1 This is a message from the Lord against the city of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.

2-3. The Lord is jealous for that which is good. He does not like evil, and takes action against wickedness. But He is slow to anger, even though He is very powerful. He will not let the wicked go unpunished. The whirlwind and the storm obey Him. The clouds are at His feet.

4-5. He orders the lakes to dry up, and they do. He commands the rivers to stop, and they do. The fields and trees turn brown, and the flowers wither. When the Lord appears, the mountains shake, the hills melt, and the people tremble.

6-7. Who can stand up against Him? Who can survive His displeasure? His presence is like a burning fire. But He is good. He is our refuge in a time of trouble. He knows those who love Him and trust Him.

8-9. The Lord will destroy those who fight against Him. Whatever evil that men do will come to an end. Sin will never begin again; it will not arise a second time.

10-11. Men act as though they're drunk. They're caught in the thornbush of sin. But the day will come

when all the wicked will be burned up. The people of Nineveh have been led astray. Satan is plotting against the Lord by giving wicked advice.

12-13. Listen, people, this is what the Lord says: "Even though the country of Assyria is strong, it will be destroyed. I had to let Assyria come and discipline you, but I will not let it happen again. I will end Assyria's power and will free you from captivity."

14. This is what the Lord says to Nineveh: "Your name will come to an end. I will destroy your carved images and the gods you worship. I will dig your grave, for you are a very wicked city."

15. Look! There on the mountains a man is coming with good news! He's bringing a message of peace! People of Judah, keep the promise you made to God. The Assyrians will never invade your land again. Their power is gone. It's been totally destroyed.

Nineveh Destroyed

2 Nineveh, listen to me! Your enemies are coming! You're under attack! Call up your troops! Guard the roads! Man your fortresses! Prepare for battle! The Lord is about to free His people and restore their dignity and glory.

3-4. Now your enemies are coming!

Their shields are red, and their uniforms are scarlet. Their chariots flash in the sun. Their horses are ready for battle. Soon their chariots will race through your streets. They glisten in the sun as if they're on fire. They dart here and there as fast as lightning.

5-7. Their troops push forward to attack. They run to the city walls and set up their battering rams. The gates break open. The palace is taken and set on fire. The people are taken into exile. The young women are as helpless as doves. They cry and beat their breasts in sorrow.

8-9. Nineveh is like a pool whose water is rushing out. Her people run from the city. Someone shouts, "Stop!" But no one listens. The enemy shouts, "Don't worry about the people! Get the silver and gold. The city is full of it!"

10-12. Nineveh is destroyed. She has been plundered. Hearts melt and knees shake. Strong men tremble, and faces grow pale. What happened to this den of lions? Her people felt as secure as cubs protected by a lioness. Her soldiers provided for their families by attacking and plundering other nations.

13. The Lord says, "I am against Nineveh. I will let your enemies come and burn up your chariots. Your army will be defeated, and your troops will be killed. I will let your enemies take away the wealth you took from other nations. Your demands on others will no longer be heard."

Nineveh Is Gone

3 Woe to Nineveh, the city that took the wealth of nations. Listen to the cracking whips, the galloping horses, and the racing chariots! Look at the charging cavalry, the flashing swords, and the glittering spears. Bodies are everywhere. Nine-

veh is being punished. She used her witchcraft to seduce other nations and to enslave their people.

5-7. The Lord says, "I am against you. I will let your enemies strip you of what you have. They will put an end to your idol worship. I will let your enemies disgrace you. They will treat you with contempt. No one will support you. They will say, 'Nineveh is in ruins! We will not mourn for her. Neither will we comfort her.'"

8-10. Nineveh, are your defenses better than those of the city of Thebes? She had a river to protect her. There was no limit to her power. Other nations were her allies. Yet she was captured and her people taken into exile. Her great men were put in chains and taken away.

11-13. Nineveh, you will drink to ease your pain, but it won't work. You will try to hide, but your enemies will go after your fortresses as if they were fig trees full of ripe fruit. Your strongest troops will be as weak as women trying to swing huge battle swords. Your city is defenseless. Your gates are on fire.

14-15. Go ahead, do what you can to defend yourself. No matter what you do, it won't work. The sword of war will cut you down. You will be eaten up like a harvest devoured by locusts. That's what you did to other nations and how you treated them.

16-17. You had so many businessmen that they were hard to count. They stripped other nations of what they had. Your officials did the same thing. They all acted like locusts who come out as soon as it gets warm to find whatever they can eat.

18-19. King of Assyria, soon your governors will be gone. Your noblemen will be dead. Your people will be scattered on the mountains

like sheep without a shepherd. clap their hands for joy, because
Your wounds will be fatal, and you there is hardly one who has not
will die. All who hear the news will felt your cruelty.

Habakkuk

INTRODUCTION: *This book was written by the prophet Habakkuk. He also lived in Judah, after the prophet Nahum. His ministry covered about forty years, from 626 to 586 B.C. Habakkuk was afraid that God would send the Babylonians against His people again because of their continued wickedness. We learn that God does not overlook or excuse sin. Finally, Habakkuk decided to put his trust in God no matter what happened.*

Habakkuk's Questions

1 Here are the questions I asked the Lord while in vision: "Lord, how long do I have to call for help before You listen? How long do I have to cry 'Violence! Injustice!' before You do anything? I can't stand such wickedness. How much longer will You put up with it?"

4. "Our laws are useless. Our courts are corrupt. The wicked get better treatment than good people. And nothing is done about it."

The Lord's Answer

5-7. The Lord said, "Keep your eyes on the nations around you, and you'll be surprised at what happens. I'm about to do something that you will not believe when I tell you. I will cause the Babylonians to rise up, those fierce and ruthless people. They will sweep across the land, spreading fear and terror wherever they go."

8-11. "Their horses can outrun leopards, and their riders are fearless. They sweep down from the mountains like eagles. When they approach a city, the people tremble. They advance like the desert wind and gather captives like grains of sand. They laugh at kings and scoff

at fortified cities. And they credit their strength to their god."

More Questions

12-14. "Lord, you are our God. You are the Holy One, the Just One. Will you let us die at the hands of the Babylonians? Have You given them power to punish us? How can You let foreign armies come and kill Your people? We have disobeyed You, but we are still more humane than these Babylonians."

15-17. "They catch people with flesh-hooks like men catch fish. They throw their nets over them and drag them through the streets behind their horses, shouting for joy. They worship their weapons of war because they bring them riches and glory. How long will they viciously destroy nations?"

To Live by Faith

2 I will climb up into one of the towers to see what the Lord will do. I wonder what He will say, and how He will answer my questions. I wonder what I will say when He rebukes me for complaining like that.

2. The Lord said to me, "Write down what I will show you in vision. Make it plain so whoever reads it can

understand it, and a messenger can keep it in mind as he runs.

3-4. "Put it in writing, because the time has not yet come for it to happen. It may seem slow in coming, but wait for it, because it will come. It will not be long delayed. This is what I want you to write: 'The nation that is proud will not survive, but those who have faith in God will.'"

5-6. "Just as wine robs a man of his senses, so is Babylon. Her kings are arrogant, proud, and selfish. They always want more power. They're like the grave, never satisfied, no matter how many people die. Nations will rise up against Babylon and say, 'How long does she think she can go on making herself rich by looting us?'"

7-8. "This message is for Babylon: You have oppressed others, now it's your turn. Nations will rise up against you and force you to pay back what you took from them. They will plunder you and do to your people what you have done to them."

9-12. "You have made yourself rich by violence and unjust wars. You have ruined the lives of many. The stones cry out against you. You have built a city on bloodshed and crimes of war. You are doomed."

13. "It is not the Lord's plan that people wear themselves out for that which is of no value, or that nations build what doesn't last."

14. "But the day is coming when the whole world will be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the sea is full of water."

15-16. "Woe to those who sell strong drink and put the bottle to their neighbor's lips making him drunk and ashamed. The time is coming when you will be filled with shame. God will turn against you and make you drink the cup of judgment."

17. "Woe to you who have cut down forests, killed animals, and destroyed the land. The time is coming when your nations will be cut down. Animals will eat your dead bodies, and the ground will drink your blood. This will happen because of what you have done."

18. "You worship gods you have made. But what good is it? What good are your idols? They only lead you astray. You put your trust in the images you make—gods that can't hear or speak."

19-20. "Woe to those who depend on idols and say to them, 'Wake up! Please listen to me!' They can't tell you what's going to happen. You dress them up in silver and gold, but they can't even breathe, much less tell you what to do. The Lord is different. He is the living God. Let all the earth be silent and listen."

The Prophet's Prayer

3 This is the prayer that Habakkuk prayed after the Lord spoke to him: "Lord, I have heard what You have done in the past, and I am filled with awe. Do Your great deeds among us again. Even though You are displeased with us, be kind and merciful to Your people."

3. Then I had a vision and saw that the Lord will come. The Holy One will come from the direction of Mount Sinai and rescue His people. His glory will cover the sky, and His praise will echo throughout the earth.

4-5. He will come with the brightness of the sun, and His glory will fill the land. Rays of light will flash from His wounded hands. That's where His power is. He will send plagues ahead of Him, and they will do His work.

6. When He walks, the earth shakes. When He looks, the nations tremble. Mountains crumble at His presence,

and hills collapse under His feet.

7-8. I saw people tremble at Your presence, Lord. What is it that displeased You? Did the rivers or oceans disobey You? Is that why You're riding the clouds like horses and driving the storm like a chariot?

9-11. You divide the sky with lightning and tear open the earth with floods. The hills and mountains see You and tremble. Rivers of water come down from the sky and sweep away everything in their path. The sea roars, and its waves rise high. At the sight of Your bow and arrows the sun and moon stand still.

12-15. You walk the earth and trample down nations. You've come to deliver Your people, to keep Your promise, and to crush the wicked one. You've caught him and killed him with Your own spear. He and his warriors were about

to kill Your people. They were gloating over what they were about to do.

16. When I saw this, my stomach churned. My heart pounded, and my lips quivered. My knees shook, and my body went limp. Now I know what will happen to the enemies of Your people. I will be patient and wait. The time will come when the Lord will punish those who have persecuted His people.

A Song of Faith

17-18. Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vine, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no wheat, though all the sheep and cattle die, I will still be joyful and sing to the Lord. I will be glad that God is my Savior.

19. The Lord is my strength. He helps me run as lightly as a deer and with ease climb the mountains.

Zephaniah

INTRODUCTION: *The prophet Zephaniah wrote this book. He lived the same time as Habakkuk and also preached to the people of Judah. His ministry covered about thirty years, from 638 to 608 B.C. We learn that at the end of time God will punish all nations for their wickedness, but sometimes He does it now. Zephaniah did a lot to prepare the way for a revival under King Josiah. The revival didn't last. So God let the Babylonians come against Jerusalem, but He promised that Judah would be restored.*

The Lord's Judgment

1 This is the message the Lord gave to Zephaniah, whose ancestry goes back to Hezekiah. This message is for Josiah, king of Judah.

2-3. The Lord said, "The day is coming when I will sweep away everything—people, animals, birds, and fish. I will destroy the wicked, and nothing but rubble will be left. I will destroy the earth.

4-6. "For now I will punish the people of Jerusalem. I will destroy their wicked priests and put an end to Baal worship. They will no longer worship the sun, moon, and stars. I will destroy those who worship Me along with the evil god Molech. I will turn against those who have turned away from Me asking guidance from idols."

7. Listen to the Lord, you people. Hold your tongues and be quiet. The day of judgment against Judah has come. The Lord will turn His people over to the Babylonians, who will come and take them captive.

8-9. The Lord said, "I will punish the king and his officials, and all those who dress like the gods they worship. I will punish those who use violence and deceit to enrich their masters.

10-11. "On that day a cry will go up from the gates of Jerusalem. The

sound of an army will be heard coming from the surrounding hills. Weep, those of you who live in the market district, because all who trade there will be killed in the war.

12-13. "I will find those who are self-satisfied and settled in their sins, who say, 'The Lord won't do anything to hurt us. Don't worry. Everything will be fine.' Their houses will be looted, their wealth taken away, and their properties destroyed. They will not live in the houses they have built, nor eat grapes from the vineyards they have planted."

14-16. That day will come very quickly. It will be a day of bitterness. Even the bravest warriors will cry out in despair. It will be a day of darkness and gloom. The trumpet of war will sound, and the fortified cities with their high walls will be taken.

17. The Lord said, "My people will be in shock. They will look straight ahead as if they were blind. Blood will flow in the streets, and dead bodies will be left to rot."

18. Their silver and gold will not save them. They will not be able to buy their way out of trouble. What is true for the land of Judah will one day be true for the whole world. The Lord will put an end to wickedness. The

whole earth will be in ruins. The end will be sudden and sure.

A Call to Repent

2 Come to your senses, people. Come to your senses before the time of trouble comes; the day that sweeps the wicked away. Seek the Lord. Do what He says. Seek righteousness; seek humility. Perhaps you will be saved from the Lord's displeasure.

A Prophecy

4-5. When the day of destruction comes to Judah, cities in nearby countries will also be attacked and left in ruins. Some will be taken in half a day. The land of the Philistines is doomed. The Lord says, "I will destroy the whole land of Canaan."

6-7. The coastal lands will become open fields for shepherds to build sheep pens. The people of Judah who survive the captivity and exile will come back and take over the land. Their sheep will find pasture, and their shepherds will sleep in the empty houses of their enemies. The Lord will watch over them and restore their prosperity.

8-9. The Lord said "I have heard the taunts of the enemies of My people. As surely as I live, their cities will be destroyed, as were Sodom and Gomorrah. My people who survive the exile will come back and take over their land."

10-11. This is what the enemies of God's people will get for their pride and arrogance. The Lord will do terrible things against them. And what He does now, He will also do at the end of the world. He will destroy their idols, and the nations will bow and worship Him, including those from distant lands and from the islands of the sea.

12-14. The Lord will use His power against Assyria. He will reach into the north and destroy Nineveh. Sheep and

cattle will come and lie down in her streets. Owls will hoot among the ruins. Rubble will cover her doorways. **15.** This is the city that boasted, "I am the greatest city in all the world." How desolate it is! It has become the home of wild animals. Travelers look at her and shake their heads.

Jerusalem

3 Jerusalem is doomed. She has become a wicked city. She oppresses her own people. She doesn't listen; she rebels at discipline and rejects her own God.

3-4. Her officials are like roaring lions; her judges like hungry wolves. Her so-called prophets are arrogant. Her priests defile the Temple and twist God's law to their own advantage.

5. But the Lord has not left the city. Every morning He blesses the people. Yet the wicked shamelessly go out daily to do evil.

6-7. The Lord says, "I have destroyed nations and turned cities into ruins. I said to Myself, 'Surely My people will respect Me. They will accept My correction. They will not forget what I have done for them.' But the more I blessed them, the more they corrupted themselves."

Judgment

8. The Lord also says, "The day is coming when I will set up court and testify against all nations. The whole world will be destroyed by the fire of My presence.

9-10. "At that time I will gather from every nation men and women who love Me. I will change the way they talk. They will stand shoulder to shoulder in support of Me. In distant lands and from beyond the great rivers My people will worship Me.

11-13. "They will no longer be put to

shame. I will remove all those who are proud and arrogant. Never again will there be rebellion in Jerusalem. Only the meek and humble will live there, those who love the Lord and trust Him. They will do no wrong. They will lie down, and no one will make them afraid."

God's Faithfulness

14-15. Let's sing and shout! Let's rejoice with all our hearts! The Lord will remove our sins and destroy our enemies. The King of Israel has not forsaken us. He is still with us. There is no reason to fear.

16-17. In that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Don't be afraid, O city of God. Don't let your shoulders droop. The Lord is in your midst, and He is strong to save. He will quiet your hearts with His love, and will rejoice over you with singing."

18-20. The Lord says, "I will gather those who mourn to a festival of praise. I will remove your burden. I will punish those who oppressed you. I will gather you from all nations and bring you back home. I will honor you in front of all nations. They will bow before Me when they see what I have done to save you."

Haggai

INTRODUCTION: *This book was written by the prophet Haggai in 520 B.C. This was after God's people returned from captivity in Babylon. They started rebuilding the Temple, but then got busy with their own things, and the work on the Temple stopped. Haggai urged the people to put God first and finish the Temple. The people listened, and in a very short time the Temple was rebuilt.*

Rebuilding the Temple

1 In the second year of Darius, the new king of Persia, the Lord gave me a message for the governor and the high priest of Judah. He said, "Why do people keep saying, 'This is not the time to build the Temple'? What makes it the right time for them to build houses while My house lies in ruins?"

5-6. Then the Lord gave me this message for the people: "Think about what you're doing! Can't you see what's happening to you? You plant much and harvest little. You have plenty of food, but you're always hungry. You have winter clothes, but you're never warm. Your money disappears as if you put it in a bag full of holes.

7-8. "Think about what you are doing. I want you to go to the mountain and cut timber for My house and start rebuilding the Temple. This will bring honor to Me in the eyes of the nations. I will take pleasure in what you're doing and bless you for it.

9. "You planned to do a lot for yourselves, but with all your hard work it turned out to be very little. You harvested and worked for wages, but I blew most of it away. Why? Because My house is in ruins, while you work on your own houses.

10-11. "That's the reason I sent so little rain. I will send a drought on the land. It will hurt the wheat, the grapes, and the fruit trees. It will affect people and animals alike."

The People Respond

12-13. The governor, the high priest, and the people listened to Haggai the prophet and decided to obey the Lord, because they loved and respected Him. Then the Lord gave Haggai this message: "I will surely help them rebuild My Temple. That's a promise."

14-15. So the Lord moved on the hearts of the governor, the high priest, and the people and gave them courage. They all determined to rebuild the Temple before anything else. Three weeks later the work began.

The New Temple

2 More than a month later the Lord said to me, "Speak to the governor, the high priest, and the people, and say, 'Does anyone remember the splendor of the first Temple before the Babylonians destroyed it? How does it look now that you've rebuilt it? To some of you, there's no comparison. **4-5.** "But don't compare it to the past. Look to the future. Be strong

and courageous, and go ahead and put on the finishing touches. I am behind what your governor, your high priest, and all of you are doing. My promise is still good. By My Spirit I am with you and will help you. So don't be afraid."

6-7. Then the Lord said to me, "Once again I will shake the heavens, the land, and the sea. I will overthrow great empires to make way for Him who is the Desire of All Nations. When He comes, He will make this house even more glorious."

8-9. "All the silver and gold on earth is Mine. So it's not silver and gold that makes My Temple glorious. The glory of this Temple will be even greater than the first Temple. From this place I will announce peace to the world and goodwill toward men."

The Priests Questioned

10-11. About two months after that, the Lord said to me, "Go and ask the priests some questions about what makes things holy and what doesn't."

12-13. So I went to the priests and asked, "If one of you takes a piece of the holy sacrifice home, does whatever it touches become holy too?" The priests answered, "No." Then I said, "If someone becomes ritually unclean and he touches something, does it become unclean too?" The priests answered, "Yes."

14. I responded, "The Lord says, 'The same is true with the Temple. The silver and gold can't make it holy. But

people can pass on evil. The glory of the first Temple can't be passed on to this one by people. This Temple can be made holy only by the presence of the Lord, and by the One He will send.'"

God's Promise

15-17. The Lord also said, "Stop and think how things were before you rebuilt this Temple. Your harvests were small, and your grapes were few. What had happened? Let Me remind you. I was the one who sent the hot winds, the hail, and the mildew to get your attention. I was hoping that you would turn to me for help. But you didn't."

18-19. "However, starting today, the very day you laid the foundation of the Temple, I will bless you. Notice what will happen to your crops, vineyards, and fruit trees. Though they have produced little, now you'll be surprised at how big your harvests will be."

The Governor Encouraged

20-22. Then the Lord spoke to me and said, "Go and tell the governor that I am willing to shake the heavens and the earth to help My people. I will overthrow the powers that want to stop the rebuilding of the Temple. I will destroy their chariots and make their horses and riders fall."

23. "I have made you My servant and have given you authority to rule in My name. You are the one I have chosen to lead My people. I, the Lord, have spoken."

Zechariah

INTRODUCTION: *The prophet Zechariah wrote this book. He worked together with the prophet Haggai, urging the people to finish building the Temple. His ministry covered about ten years, from 520 to 510 B.C. This book has many encouraging prophecies. Zechariah told the people that God would forgive them and that one day He will do away with all sin and will rule the earth.*

Call to Repentance

1 In the second year of Darius, the new king of Persia, the Lord gave me this message for the people:

2-4. "I was displeased with your parents and grandparents. So don't be like them. Return to Me, and I will return to you. My prophets told them to stop their wickedness. I begged them to turn from their sinful ways, but they didn't listen.

5-6. "Where are those who were taken into exile? They and their false prophets are dead. But My word lives on. Your ancestors suffered the results of their sins, as I said they would. They were taken captive and were in exile for seventy years. Finally, they repented and said, 'The Lord was just, and did what He said He would.'"

A Vision of Horses

7-8. That same year the Lord gave me the first of eight visions. First I saw a man sitting on a red horse standing among the trees. In the valley behind him were a number of horses. Some were red, some spotted, and some white. They all had riders on them.

9-10. I asked my angel, "What does this mean?" He said, "The Lord will tell you." Then I knew that the One

sitting on the red horse was the Lord. He said, "These riders and horses represent angels who are ready to patrol the earth for Me."

11. Then I saw the riders leave, and when they came back, they said to the One on the red horse, "Lord, we patrolled the earth and found the world at peace. No nation is intending to attack Your people."

Jerusalem

12. Then the One on the horse turned His face toward heaven and said, "Lord God, You sent the people of Jerusalem and Judah into exile for seventy years. Now they're back. How much longer before You will prosper them again?"

13-14. God answered Him with comforting words. Then the One on the horse said to me, "Go and tell the people that the God of Israel says, 'I love Judah and Jerusalem.'

15. "But I am not pleased with the nations who are happy with what they have done to My people. I was not pleased with My people, either; that's why I let their enemies come and punish them. But they were very cruel to them and brought on too much suffering.

16-17. "I will come back to Jerusalem

and have mercy on My people and comfort them. The Temple will be rebuilt, and so will the city. The cities and towns of Judah are Mine. They will all prosper. I will bless My people, and Jerusalem will be My home again."

A Vision of Horns

18-19. In the second vision I saw four horns. I asked my angel, "What do these horns mean?" He said, "They represent the nations that attacked God's people and took them into exile."

20-21. Then I saw four workmen coming with hammers. I asked my angel, "What are these men going to do?" He said, "They're the Lord's helpers who have come to rebuild Jerusalem and to stop the nations from using their power to and attack her again."

A Vision of a Measuring Line

2 In the third vision I saw a young man standing in front of me with a measuring line in his hand. I asked him, "Where are you going with that?" He said, "To measure Jerusalem and then rebuild it."

3-4. Then the angel who had talked to me went to meet the young man. Another angel said to the first one, "Go ahead and tell the young man that the size of Jerusalem must not be limited. She's to be like a city without walls so she can grow."

5. "The Lord will protect the city. He will be as a wall of fire around her. His plan is to live there with His people again and be Jerusalem's glory."

The Exiles

6-7. The Lord said, "Now it's time for My people to come back from the north. I let them be taken captive and scattered among the nations because of their wickedness. They should re-

turn from Babylon to help rebuild the Temple and the city."

8-9. He also said to me, "Tell the nations that plundered Jerusalem, 'If any of you ever touch My people, you will touch the apple of My eye. I will raise My hand against you and plunder your cities. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

10-12. Then the Lord gave me this message: "Sing for joy, you people of Jerusalem, for I will come to live with you again. Many from all nations will join My people and they too will be Mine. Judah and Jerusalem will be special to Me."

13. So, people, be quiet and listen to the Lord. One day He will come from His home in heaven to claim all those who are His.

A Vision of the High Priest

3 In the fourth vision I saw Joshua, the high priest, standing before the Lord as our representative. I saw Satan standing there accusing him of sin. I heard the Lord say to Satan, "God rebuke you. He who loves Jerusalem will destroy you. Joshua, the high priest, represents all those who have been snatched from the fire."

3-4. Now, I noticed that Joshua was wearing filthy clothes covered with the sins of God's people. The Lord looked at him, then turned to the angels nearby and said, "Take away his filthy clothes." Then He said to Joshua, "I will take away these sins and give you new clothes to wear."

5. The Lord turned back to the angels and said, "Give him a clean white robe, and put a new turban on his head." So that's what the angels did as the Lord stood by and watched.

God's Promise

6-7. Then the Lord said to Joshua, "If

you obey and live by My commandments, then these new clothes will always be yours, and you will be in charge of My Temple. I will hear your prayers, and one day you will stand in My presence, as these angels do.

8. "So listen to Me. You represent My Son, who will come to this Temple. He is My servant, the Branch from the royal house of David. He is the one I promised to send.

9. "Look at the stone I placed in front of Joshua, the high priest. It has seven eyes and My signature on it. Through this stone I will remove the guilt of the land in one day.

10. "Then My people will invite their friends to come and sit with them in their vineyard or under their fig tree. They will enjoy the peace and prosperity that will be theirs forever."

A Vision of a Lamp and Trees

4 In the fifth vision my angel shook me as if I had been sleeping and said to me, "What do you see?" I answered, "I see a tall golden lampstand with a large bowl on top filled with oil. Also I see seven tubes coming out of the bowl feeding oil to seven lamps.

3. "Just above the golden lampstand and on either side of it are two olive trees. Each one has a golden pipe coming out of it, pumping oil into the large bowl on top of the lampstand."

4-6. Then I asked the angel, "What does all this mean?" He said, "Don't you know?" I answered, "No, I don't." He replied, "This is the message of the Lord to the governor: 'Not by might, nor by power, but by the Holy Spirit will the work be done.'

7. "Even a problem as big as a mountain in the way of the governor is nothing. As the people push ahead with the work, the mountain will dis-

appear. When the last stone of the Temple is put in place, the people will shout, 'Praise the Lord! What marvelous grace He has shown to us!'"

8-9. The Lord said to me, "The governor laid the foundation of the Temple, and he will finish it. Then you will know that the Lord has been behind it.

10. "Don't look down on small beginnings and become discouraged. People will respond when they see the governor at the building site. Remember the seven burning lamps that receive their oil from the bowl? They represent the eyes of the Lord watching everything that goes on in the world."

11-14. Then I asked my angel, "What do the two big olive trees represent?" When he didn't answer, I asked him again. Then he said, "Don't you know?" I replied, "No, I don't." He said, "The olive trees represent the two anointed angels who stand next to God and help Him carry on His work."

A Vision of a Scroll

5 In the sixth vision I saw an open scroll flying through the air. My angel said, "What do you see?" I said, "An open scroll about thirty feet long flying through the air."

3-4. He said, "The scroll represents what will come on the whole world. Everyone who lies and steals will be punished, just as it says on the scroll. The Lord says, 'I will send the message of the scroll to the house of every thief and liar. The message will stay with them, and those who continue to lie and steal will be destroyed.'"

A Vision of a Woman

5-7. In the seventh vision the angel said to me, "What do you see in the distance coming toward you?" I answered, "I can't tell what it is." He said, "It's a basket full of the sins of the

world." I looked and saw that the basket had a lid. Then the lid raised, and I saw a woman sitting in the basket.

8. The angel said, "The woman's name is wickedness." I looked again and saw her trying to get out of the basket. When she did, the angel pushed her back in and closed the lid.

9-11. Then I saw two women flying toward me with big powerful wings. They picked up the basket with the woman in it and flew away. I said to the angel, "Where are they taking her?" He said, "They're taking her to Babylon to build a house for her. When it's done, they'll put her in it, because that's where all wickedness belongs."

A Vision of Chariots

6 In the eighth vision I saw four chariots coming out of heaven between two bronze mountains. The first one was being pulled by red horses, the second one by black horses, the third one by white horses, and the fourth one by speckled horses. All the horses were big and powerful.

4-6. I asked the angel, "What does all this mean?" He said, "The chariots and horses represent angels sent by the Lord. The black horses will go north, the white ones west, the speckled ones south, and the red ones east."

7-8. I noticed that the horses were impatient. When my angel said, "Go!" they took off. A little later he said to me, "Look! The horses going north to Persia have accomplished their mission. They persuaded the king to let God's people continue building the Temple. The Lord's will for the north has been done."

Joshua, the High Priest

9-11. Then the Lord said to me, "Go and see the three men who brought the silver and gold from Babylon, and

ask them for some of it. Then go to the house of Joshua, who's in charge of the priests, make a crown of silver and gold, and put it on Joshua's head.

12-13. "Tell him that this is what the Lord says: 'The One who is called the Branch from the house of David will come to the Temple and fill it with glory. He will also build a spiritual temple made up of people. He will serve as king and high priest to carry out God's plan of salvation. This was agreed to in heaven's counsel of peace long ago.'

14. "The crown you made for Joshua should then be kept in the Temple as a memorial. It should be placed in care of the three men who gave you the silver and gold.

15. "Gifts will come from far away to help rebuild the temple. When it's finished, he will know that the message I gave you was from Me. But all of this will happen only if he listens to Me and does as I say."

Obedience

7 Two years later, in the fourth year of Darius, the new king of Persia, the Lord gave me a message for the people. About this same time the people of Bethel sent two men along with the elders to the new Temple to pray and to ask God for a favor.

3-4. They also asked the priests and prophets this question: "Should we continue to fast and mourn every fifth month over the destruction of our old Temple as we have for years?" Then I knew that the message that the Lord had given me was for them.

5. The Lord said, "Ask these men this question: 'When you fasted and mourned every fifth month and some of you every seventh month all the years in captivity, did you fast and mourn because of your sins or because of the Temple?'

6-7. "When you were fasting, what were you thinking about? You were thinking about the honor and glory the Temple had brought to you as a people. So your fasting didn't mean a thing. When Jerusalem was prospering, didn't I send My prophets to tell you what would happen if you continued to sin?"

Disobedience

8-10. Then the Lord gave me another message and said, "For years I have told My people over and over to see that justice is done. They needed to be merciful and kind. I told them to take care of the poor, the widows, the orphans, and the foreigners who come to live among them.

11-13. "But they didn't listen. They shrugged their shoulders and paid no attention to what I said. Soon their hearts became as hard as stone. They refused to take seriously the messages I sent them by the Holy Spirit through My prophets.

14. "I had no choice but to withdraw My protection. Their enemies took them captive and scattered them among the nations. Their country became so desolate that nobody wanted to pass that way. So My own people caused the temple to be destroyed. They can't put all the blame on the Babylonians."

Jerusalem's Future

8 Again the Lord spoke to me. "I love My people and have always loved them," He said. "My love for Jerusalem is like a fire in My heart. I am not happy with the way her enemies have treated her.

3-5. "I will come and live with My people. Jerusalem will be known as the City of Truth. And the mountain on which she sits will be called the Holy

Mountain of God. Once again the elderly will walk in safety, and boys and girls will play in the streets.

6-8. "This may seem hard to believe by the few now living here. But nothing is too hard for the Lord. I will bring My people home from the east and the west to live in Jerusalem again. As their God I will always be truthful and righteous to them.

9-10. "I gave you the same message through My prophets before you laid the foundation of the Temple. So be of good courage. When the exiles first came back from Babylon, there was no money to hire builders to work on the Temple. The city itself wasn't safe, and people didn't trust each other.

11-13. "I will not discipline you with exile again. Plant your crops. Your vines will bear fruit. The rains will come, and you will have good harvests. I will bless you and your inheritance, so don't be afraid. Take courage and finish My Temple. I will protect you, and you will be a blessing to all nations around you.

14-17. "I had to discipline your forefathers and let them be taken to Babylon because they rebelled against Me. Just as surely as that happened, I will now bless Jerusalem. So don't be afraid to build. Be honest with each other. Practice true justice. And don't hurt your neighbor by making false promises. I hate such things."

18-19. Then the Lord gave me another message and said, "The religious festivals will again be a time of joy and gladness. So love Me and be at peace with each other.

20-22. "The day is coming when people from many nations will come to Jerusalem. They will say to others, 'We're going to worship the Lord and ask for His blessing. Why don't you come along?' Also leaders from pow-

erful nations will come to worship Me to ask for My blessing.

23. "In those days, foreigners will take hold of the arm of an Israelite and say, 'We want to have a part in your future, because we know that God is with you.'"

A Prophecy

9 Then the Lord gave me this message for Syria and her capital Damascus: "The Lord has His eye on everything, especially on Israel. The land of Syria belongs to Him, as do the cities of Tyre and Sidon, even though the people don't think they need Him.

3-5. "Tyre has built strong fortifications and has so much silver and gold it's almost as common as dust. But the Lord will take away everything she has. He will destroy her power at sea, and let her be burned to the ground. Other cities will see this and be afraid. Their hopes of survival will be shattered.

6-8. "Foreign armies will come and destroy their pride. But the Lord will change the hearts of those who turn to Him. They will forsake their pagan diet and become part of His people. They will even become leaders. I will guard My land and not let My people be exiled again."

The Coming King

9-10. The Lord also said, "Rejoice! Shout for joy, people of Jerusalem! Your King is coming! He is triumphant and victorious! He is gentle and kind, riding on a young donkey. He will bring peace to the nations. The chariots and battle horses will be gone. He will rule from sea to sea, from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.

11-12. "Because of My covenant with you, which was sealed by blood, I will

set you free. I will take you out of the prison house of sin and from the pit you find yourself in. You are not prisoners without hope. I will be your fortress and bless you twice over for the sufferings you have gone through. **13-14.** "Judah will be like a bow in My hand. The people of Jerusalem will be like My sword as they make their way back from Babylon. No one will dare touch them. The Lord will be above them and will use lightning as His arrows. He will sound the trumpet and march in the storms from the south.

15. "The day is coming when the Lord will protect His people and destroy their enemies. In that day His people will shout for joy as men who have won the battle shout. The enemies of His people will be destroyed like sacrifices on the altar.

16-17. "When that day comes, the Lord will protect His people as a shepherd protects his flock. He will save them, and they will shine like jewels in His crown. How beautiful they will look! They will be young again, and will eat the fruit of the land made new."

God's People

10 Ask the Lord for the last rain just before the harvest, and He will send clouds filled with showers for every plant in the field.

2. People go to fortunetellers, but what they say about dreams and visions is not true. Their counsel is worthless. People wander around like lost sheep without a shepherd to guide and protect them.

3. The Lord says, "I am displeased with the way the leaders of nations have treated My people, and I will punish them for it. The people of Judah and Jerusalem are Mine; I will take care of them and give them courage and spirit.

4-5. "Out of Judah will come the Ruler,

the Mighty Warrior. He is also the Battle Bow, the Great Cornerstone and Secure Tent Peg. Nothing will stand in His way or in the way of My people. They will be united like soldiers going to battle. They will be victorious because I, the Lord, am with them.

6-7. "I will make the people of Judah strong and will save their descendants. I will have mercy on them and will bring them back home. I will hear their prayers. They will be strong, and their hearts will rejoice. The children will catch their spirit and be glad.

8-9. "I will call My people from afar and redeem them. There will be as many of them as before. Though I scattered them among the nations, no matter where they are they will survive and return home together.

10-11. "I will bring them back from Assyria and Babylon. The whole land will be filled with My people. They will pass through a sea of trouble, but I will dry up that sea the way that I did the Red Sea when My people came out of Egypt. The proud nations will be humbled and their mighty armies taken away.

12. "I will give My people courage. They will worship Me and keep My commandments. I, the Lord, have spoken."

Nations Are Like Trees

11 Open your eyes, people of Lebanon. Look outside! Fire has consumed your mighty cedars! Great nations are being laid low! Let the weaker trees weep because the mighty trees are ruined. Let the rulers roar like lions in pain because the tight-knit ranks of warriors have been broken. Their glory and riches are gone.

Wicked Shepherds

4-5. The Lord said to me, "Go and get

a job as a shepherd of sheep to be raised for the market. You'll see shepherds that have no conscience. They'll kill a sheep, sell the wool and meat, and pocket the money. Then they'll say, 'Praise the Lord!' This is what wicked shepherd leaders do to My people.

6. "I will no longer pity My people and have compassion on them, because they love their false shepherds more than they love Me. I will let their neighbors devastate the land, and I will not deliver them from such people and their king."

7. So I went and got a job, and was put in charge of a flock that was to be fattened and taken to market. I used two shepherd rods to guide and protect them. One rod I called Beauty and the other, Bonds. This is what the Lord told me to do.

8-9. During the first month I had to get rid of three undershepherds who didn't like to be told what to do. The sheep, too, didn't listen to me, no matter how kind I was to them. So I said, "I quit. Let those who are sick die, and the rest be taken to market ahead of time. If any escape, let them be killed."

10-11. Then I took the rod called Beauty and broke it in two as a sign that God will no longer be merciful to His people. The buyers were watching me and knew it was a message from the Lord.

12. I said to the sheep owners, "If you think I deserve to be paid for taking care of your sheep, pay me. If not, then don't." They decided to give me thirty small pieces of silver, the price of a slave.

13-14. Then the Lord said to me, "Go to the Temple and throw the money on the floor of the treasury." And that's what I did. I also broke the rod call Bonds as a sign of the end of the

unity between Judah and Israel. Those who saw me do it knew that it was a message from the Lord.

15-16. After all that, the Lord said to me, "Go and get another job as a shepherd. This time act the part of a bad shepherd. Since My people like bad shepherd leaders, I will let them have one. He will rule the country with harshness. He won't care for the young, the weak, and the sick. And he will use the best of everything only for himself.

17. "Woe to the shepherd leader who doesn't care for the sheep! The sword will come into the land, and his power will be taken away. His wisdom to save the country will be gone."

The Lord Takes Action

12 This is the message the Lord of heaven and earth gave to me: "The day is coming when I will make Jerusalem like a cup of poisonous wine. Her enemies will invade the land, drink of that cup, and die.

3. "The day is coming when the evil one, the chief rebel, will stir up the nations against My people. But I will make Jerusalem like a big rock, and those who try to move it will only hurt themselves.

4-6. "When they attack, I will frighten their horses, and their riders will panic. I will watch over My people and defeat the nations. Their leaders will say, 'The people of Judah are strong because of their God.' I will make the men of Judah as powerful as a forest fire. The attackers will be defeated, and My people will be safe.

7-9. "I will give victory to My people, and everyone in Jerusalem will be as strong as the house of David. Even the weak will be strong. I will protect Jerusalem and destroy the nations that attack My city.

10. "I will pour out My Spirit on the

family of David and on all the people. They will see the One they have crucified and will weep over their sins. They will be sorry for what they have done to Him.

11-14. "They will weep as people do when their entire city is destroyed and all that they have is gone. Men and women will weep, each one alone. Leaders from the house of David and their wives will also weep alone. So will such spiritual leaders as Nathan the prophet, the priest, and the Temple workers. Each family that remains will weep alone."

God's People

13 The Lord continued: "On that day I will wash away the sins of My people. I will take away their gods; and the people will not even remember them. All desire to worship other gods will be gone. Also false prophets and evil spirits will be gone from the land.

3-5. "The false prophets will be seen for what they are. Even their parents will agree that these men have no right to live, because of the lies they told in the Lord's name. They will wish they had never said that the visions were from the Lord. They will say, 'We wish we had stayed on the farm.'

6. "On that day some people will come up to Me and say, 'What are these scars in Your hands?' I will answer, 'These are scars from the wounds I received in the house of My friends.'"

The Chief Shepherd

7. The God of Israel says, "Before that final day comes, death will come to My Shepherd, the one who is My equal. They will smite Him, and His followers will scatter. My hand will be against those who do this.

8-9. "Many will be cut off and die,

but not all. I will purify those who are left as men purify silver and gold. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'These are My people.' And they will say, 'This is our God.'"

God's Plan for Israel

14 The day will come when the Lord will judge His people. He will let a strong nation come against Jerusalem and destroy it. His people will be taken, but some will be left. Then God will go to battle against all nations who have hurt His people, and He will destroy them.

4-5. His feet will touch the Mount of Olives, and it will split in two to make a huge valley. This will happen when the Lord comes down from heaven and all the angels come with Him.

6-8. From that day on, there will be no more cold or darkness. It will always be day. Even at night there will be light. Only the Lord knows when that day will come. The river of life will flow from God's throne through New Jerusalem and out to the seas of the world.

9-11. God will be king over all the earth. Everyone will worship Him, and His name alone will be honored. The land of Judah will be a great plain, and Jerusalem will tower above the land around it. The city will be huge, and God's people will live there

in safety. Never again will they be threatened by destruction.

12-13. The Lord will send a plague on all nations that fought against His people. Their skin will be covered with sores. Their eyes will burn, and their tongues will not move. They will be so afraid of the Lord that they will panic and attack each other.

14. For now, if His people will be faithful to the Lord, He will defend Jerusalem. The wealth of nations will flow into the city, and gold and silver will be in abundance.

15-19. A plague from the Lord will come on the wicked nations and on their animals. The people from all nations on whom the plague does not fall will come to Jerusalem to worship the King. But those who refuse to join God's people, including the land of Egypt, will receive no rain. This is part of their punishment.

20. In those days nations will come to Jerusalem in peace. On the bells of horses will be inscribed "Holy to the Lord." And everything used in the Lord's house will be as holy as the altar.

21. Everything in Jerusalem and throughout the land of Judah will be set apart to serve the Lord and to honor His name. People from everywhere will come to Jerusalem to worship. No longer will merchants come to sell their goods in the Temple of the Lord.

Malachi

INTRODUCTION: *The book was written by the prophet Malachi about 425 B.C. After the Temple and Jerusalem were rebuilt, the people again stopped loving God with all their hearts. Malachi answered their questions and told them that God would judge them by their actions. We learn that love is shown, not so much by what we say, but by what we do.*

Esau and Jacob

1 This is a message the Lord gave me for Israel. He said, "I have always loved you. But you asked, 'How do we know that?' Wasn't Esau the twin of Jacob? Wasn't he born first? Yet I chose Jacob and his descendants to be known as a special people. 3-5. "Esau's descendants turned against Me. So I had to discipline them by making their land desolate. They said, 'Even if our country is destroyed, we will rebuild.' But I will destroy what you do. You will be known as the people with whom the Lord was displeased. Then the descendants of Jacob will say, 'The power of the Lord is great.'"

The Priests

6. The Lord says, "A son respects his father and a servant his master. If I'm your Father, why don't you respect Me?" You say, 'How do we not respect You?' 7-9. "You do it by bringing Me animals that are worthless. They're sick, blind, and lame. Is that the right thing to do? Try bringing an animal like that to your governor as a gift. Do you think he'll accept it? Yet you expect Me to accept it and even bless you for it. I will not do so. 10. "I wish that someone had the

courage to shut the Temple doors to keep the priests from sacrificing such animals. I will not accept these kinds of offerings.

11-12. "But the time will come when people from all parts of the world will honor Me. They will bring Me worthwhile offerings because they respect Me. Yet, you, My own people, show contempt for My altar by offering animals that I cannot accept.

13. "You priests say, 'Our work is nothing but drudgery. We're tired of all this.' You turn up your noses at My altar and continue to bring Me sick and crippled animals, even stolen ones! Do you expect Me to be happy about this?

14. "A man who has an excellent animal in his flock promises to bring it to Me as an offering. But then he changes his mind and brings Me a sick one instead. That's bad. Am I not a great king? Don't I rule over all the nations of the world?"

Corruption

2 This message is again for the priests. The Lord says, "If you don't honor My name, I will take away the blessings I gave you. In fact, I have already taken some of them away because you don't take

what I say seriously. Even your children are acting like you. I will reject the offerings you bring, and put you out of My presence.

4-5. "I have warned you again and again not to turn away from the covenant I made with your ancestor, Levi, the son of Jacob. My promise was one of life and peace, and that's what I gave them. In return I expected them to respect Me and honor My name.

6. "In those days the priests taught the people what was true. No lies or false teachings came from their lips. They did what was right and helped others do so as well. That's what priests are supposed to do.

7. "They are to preserve a knowledge of God among the people and teach them the truth about Me. And the people should be learning to do My will from the priests, for I have chosen them to be My messengers.

8-9. "But you have turned from doing what's right. Your example and what you teach the people have caused many to stumble. You have rejected the covenant I made with your ancestor Levi. Because you have not obeyed Me, I will make the people turn against you. You have not upheld My law, so the people will no longer respect your judgment."

The Prophet

10. Then the prophet Malachi said to the priests, "Now listen to me. Don't we all have the same Father? Didn't one God create us? Why have you turned your back on the covenant God gave to your ancestor Levi? Why did you lie to our people?"

11-12. "Now the people make promises to God that they don't intend to keep. They don't believe what God said, nor do they respect His Temple. Our young men marry women who worship other

gods and have no intention of worshipping the God of heaven. The Lord will punish those who do this and those who approve such marriages.

13. "There's another thing that you do. You flood the Lord's altar with tears because He no longer accepts your offerings nor answers your prayers.

14. "Have you asked yourselves why? It's because you have broken the promise you made to your wife when you got married. You have been unfaithful in spite of the fact that you promised God to make her your partner.

15. "At that time God made the two of you one. Why is He so concerned about this? He wants you to raise godly children and be an example to them. So don't break your promise to be faithful to your wife.

16. "The Lord says, 'I hate it when a man is unfaithful to his wife and divorces her. What is even worse is that he pretends to be innocent.' So guard your affections and don't break the promise you made to your wife when the two of you got married.

17. "The Lord is getting tired of your empty words. Yet you ask, 'How have we tired Him?' Let me tell you. You say, 'The Lord loves everyone and isn't too concerned what people do.' You know that isn't true. And yet you keep on saying, 'He's not a God of justice, but a God of love.'"

The Elijah Message

3 Listen to what the Lord says: "I will send a messenger to prepare the way for the Messiah to come. The very one you desire to come will suddenly come. He will come and visit the Temple."

2. Who will make up God's people in the last days? Who will stand when He comes the second time? His presence

will be like a fire that purifies metal.

3-4. He will come, not to offer salvation, but to judge the world. He will purify His people as a refiner purifies silver and gold. His people will offer Him pure hearts and a right spirit. These are the kinds of offerings that the people brought to God in years gone by.

5. The Lord says, "I will come and judge those who practice magic, are unfaithful, and lie. I will judge those who cheat laborers out of wages, take advantage of widows and orphans, and deprive foreigners of justice. And I will judge those who don't appreciate what I have done for them."

6-7. "I haven't changed. I'm still the same. That's why those who have turned against Me, who have not kept My commandments, have not been destroyed. Return to Me, and I will return to you. You say, 'What do we have to do to return?'"

8-9. "Let Me ask you: Is it right for people to steal from the God they worship? Yet that's what you have done to Me. You say, 'How did we do that?' You do it by taking tithes and offerings from Me. That's why I can't bless you. You're taking from Me what is rightfully Mine."

10-12. "Bring My tithe to the Temple so there will be plenty of food in My house. Try Me and see if I will not open the gates of heaven and pour out so many blessings that you won't be able to count them. I will protect your crops and vineyards, and you will have huge harvests. People everywhere will call you blessed."

13-15. "You say, 'Have we ever complained?' But you have said, 'It doesn't pay to serve God and keep His law. We haven't gained a thing by being sorry for our sins. We have to look after ourselves. That's the only way to get ahead. Other people don't

pay attention to God, and look how they prosper. Yet He doesn't do a thing about it.'"

Book of Remembering

16. But there are those who love and respect the Lord. They often talk to each other about Him. The Lord hears it and writes it in heaven's book of remembering. Those who do this bring honor to His name.

17-18. The Lord says, "These people are My treasured possession. When I come back, I will show the world who they are. I will love them, and have compassion on them as a father's heart goes out to his son who loves and obeys him. Then everyone will see the difference between those who really love God and serve Him, and those who don't."

The Day of the Lord

4 The Lord says, "The day is coming when the proud and arrogant and every evildoer will burn up as straw in a furnace. The whole world will be on fire. Not one of the wicked will survive, not even the one who is the root of all evil. Nor will his helpers."

2-3. "But for you who respect and honor My name, the Son of God will come like the rising sun and will flood the earth with healing. You will jump for joy and be as free and happy as little calves growing up. In those days the wicked will be gone. They will return to dust and be no more."

4. "So don't forget the teachings of My servant Moses and the commandments I gave him at Mount Sinai. They are for everyone."

5. "But before I come, I will send a message throughout the world like the one Elijah gave to Israel. He asked the people to make up their minds whose side they were on."

6. "This message will go around the world and make My people one. It will touch the hearts of parents and children and fill them with love for each other. Even though the world will be destroyed, My people will be saved."

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New Testament

new testament

Matthew

INTRODUCTION: *This book was written by Matthew, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. It's the first of four Gospels and, as the others, covers the period from about 5 B.C. to A.D. 30. It tells us about Jesus' birth, His life, His teachings, and His death and resurrection. It was written for the Jewish people to show them that Jesus was the Messiah the Old Testament promised. Two important people in this book besides Jesus are John the Baptist and Peter.*

The Family Record of Jesus

1 This gospel is about Jesus, whose human family can be traced back to King David and from there back to Abraham.

2-17. Starting with Abraham, who was the father of Isaac and the grandfather of Jacob, to the time of David, there were fourteen generations. From David, who was the father of Solomon, to the time of Daniel, there were also fourteen generations. And from the time of Daniel on down to the time of Joseph and Mary and then Jesus, there were again fourteen generations.

18-19. When Mary, the mother of Jesus, was planning to marry Joseph, she discovered that she was going to have a baby. Joseph loved Mary, but now that she was already pregnant, he wondered about marrying her.

20-21. Then one night an angel said to him in a dream, "Don't worry about Mary. Go ahead and marry her, just as you had planned. Mary's baby is the Son of God. When He's born, God wants you to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

22-23. This happened just as Isaiah the prophet had predicted when he said, "A young woman will have a

baby boy, and He will be called Emmanuel, which means 'God is one with us.'"

24-25. After this dream Joseph went ahead and married Mary, just as he had planned. And when the baby was born, he also named Him Jesus, as the angel had told him to.

Wise Men Come to See Jesus

2 Jesus was born in Bethlehem not far from Jerusalem when Herod was king. At that time wise men from another country came to Jerusalem asking about Jesus.

2. They said, "Where can we find the Baby who is born to be King of the Jews? For weeks we've been following a star we believed would help us find Him, and it has led us to Jerusalem. We've come here to honor Him."

3-4. When King Herod heard of a Baby that was born to be King, he was worried. He called the religious leaders together and demanded to know who this baby King was and where He had been born.

5-6. They replied that a Baby was to be born in Bethlehem who would someday become King. And they showed him what the prophet Micah had predicted: "Even though Bethle-

hem is small and unimportant, it is the place where our king will be born."

7-8. So the king invited the wise men in and asked them when they had first seen the star. Then he sent them on to Bethlehem to look for the baby King. When they found Him, they were to come back and let him know, because Herod said that he too would like to go and honor Him.

9. As soon as the wise men left the palace, they were happy to see the star again. They followed it to Bethlehem. It stopped over the house where Joseph and Mary were now living.

10-11. When they saw the Baby, they knelt down and worshiped Him. They gave little Jesus presents of gold, sweet-smelling incense, and expensive perfume.

12. That night God spoke to the wise men in a dream and told them not to go back to the king to tell him where the Baby was. They should return home another way, which the wise men did.

Joseph Goes to Egypt

13. After the wise men had left, an angel spoke to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Take Mary and the Baby and leave for Egypt right away. Stay there until I tell you to come back, because in the morning the king will send soldiers to find and kill Baby Jesus."

14. Joseph immediately saddled the donkey and, in the middle of the night, the three of them headed for Egypt.

15. The family stayed in Egypt until King Herod died. Then they came back home. This is what the prophet Hosea had predicted when he said, "God's Son will come back home from Egypt."

16. When King Herod heard that the wise men had gone home without telling him where Baby Jesus was, he became very angry! He sent sol-

diers to Bethlehem to kill all boy babies under two years old.

17-18. This is what the prophet Jeremiah had predicted would happen when he said, "Mothers in Israel will cry because a cruel king will kill their babies, and it will be hard for them to get over it."

19-21. Not long after Joseph had taken his family to Egypt, the angel spoke to Joseph in a dream, saying, "The king is dead, so it's safe for you to go back home." Then Joseph took Mary and Jesus and returned home.

22-23. When he heard that the new king was as cruel as his father had been, Joseph was afraid to go back to Bethlehem. Then the angel told him to go to Nazareth where they were from. Joseph obeyed and went back home. This had been predicted long before. So Jesus grew up in Nazareth instead of Bethlehem.

John the Baptist

3 After Jesus was grown, his cousin John started preaching outdoors in a desert not far from Jerusalem.

2-3. John said to the people, "Repent and change your ways, because God is about to set up His kingdom. This was what the prophet Isaiah predicted when he said, 'I hear the voice of a preacher saying, "Prepare the way for the Lord; make it easy for Him to save us."'"

4-6. John was dressed like the old-time prophets in a short robe made of animal skin, with a leather belt. He ate very simple food. He preached by the Jordan River, and people from everywhere came to hear him. Many were sorry for their sins and were baptized.

7-8. Some of the religious leaders also came to hear him. When John saw them he said, "Are you sure you have come to be baptized because you've

changed your life? You can be as deceptive as snakes in the grass. Have you ever thought about the warnings of God's judgment? If you're truly sorry for your sins, you need to act like it.

9-10. "Don't tell me that you come from respected families and are descendants of Abraham; that's not enough. You need to change your life and be good. You need to be like a tree that has good fruit. Trees that don't produce good fruit are cut down and used for firewood.

11-12. "I can baptize you only with water on the outside. But soon Someone will come who can baptize you with the Holy Spirit on the inside and help you to be good. He's also like a farmer who puts good wheat in his barn but burns up the weeds."

13. When Jesus heard that His cousin John was baptizing in the Jordan River, He went there and asked John to baptize Him, too.

14-15. John said, "I shouldn't baptize You! You should baptize me!" Jesus answered, "I want you to baptize Me, because it's the right thing to do." So John baptized Him.

16-17. When Jesus came up out of the river, He knelt on the bank and prayed. Heaven opened, and the Holy Spirit descended as gently as a dove and hovered as a light over Jesus' head. Then God spoke from heaven, saying, "This is My Son. I am very pleased with Him."

Satan Tempts Jesus

4 After Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit told Him to go into the wilderness to pray and to prepare for His ministry. He fasted and prayed for forty days. After that, He was very hungry.

3-4. Satan knew where Jesus was. So he came and made himself look like

an angel. He said, "If You are the Son of God, it should be no problem for You to turn these stones into bread." As hungry as Jesus was, He knew it was Satan tempting Him. So He said, "Man can't live on bread alone, but needs the Word of God."

5. But Satan didn't give up. He picked Jesus up and took Him back to Jerusalem to the highest point on the Temple wall, looking down into the deep valley below.

6-7. Then he said to Jesus, "Show me how much faith you have in God by jumping off this wall. The Bible says that God will send angels to take care of those who love Him." Jesus knew that Satan was twisting God's Word. So He answered, "God does not want us to show how much we trust Him by doing something foolish."

8. Satan still didn't give up. Next he carried Jesus to a very high mountain and showed Him all the beautiful things of this world.

9-10. He said to Jesus, "You don't have to die to save the world. I'll give all this to You if You'll just bow down and worship me one time." Jesus answered, "Get away from Me, Satan. God is the one who owns this world. I worship no one but God."

11. Then Satan took Jesus back to the wilderness and left Him there. By now Jesus was so weak that He was close to dying. But God sent angels to help Him and give Him strength.

Jesus Begins His Ministry

12-13. Meanwhile, the king had John the Baptist put in prison. When Jesus heard this, He did not stay in Nazareth, but instead went to live in Capernaum, which was by the Sea of Galilee.

14-16. The prophet Isaiah had predicted this by saying, "The people liv-

ing by the Sea of Galilee, next to the river Jordan, will be blessed. They will see a great light, and that light will give them hope."

17. Jesus was that light. He started preaching to the people, saying, "Change your ways, because God's kingdom is among you."

18-20. One day as Jesus was walking by the sea, He noticed two brothers, Peter and Andrew, fishing with nets. Jesus called and said, "Come with Me, and I'll show you how to catch people." They pulled their boat to shore and followed Him.

21-22. A little farther Jesus saw two more brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat. They were mending torn nets with their father. He said the same thing to them. And they too followed Jesus.

23. He went around Galilee preaching and teaching, telling people the good news about God. And He showed that God loved them by healing all those who were sick.

24. When people heard what Jesus was doing, they came from everywhere to be healed. They had all kinds of sicknesses. Some couldn't even walk and had to be carried, but Jesus healed them all.

25. Wherever Jesus went, people followed Him. Many came from nearby, and some even came from other countries.

Jesus Blesses the People

5 One day Jesus saw people crowding the streets trying to get a glimpse of Him. So He went out of town to a hillside where there was plenty of room. He sat down, and His disciples sat next to Him. Then He blessed the people and talked to them about true happiness, saying,

3. "Happy are those who feel their spir-

itual need. Heaven belongs to them.

4. "Happy are those who, when they are sad, believe what God says and trust Him. He will comfort them.

5. "Happy are those who are humble. One day the whole world will belong to them.

6. "Happy are those who want to do what is right. God will reward them.

7. "Happy are those who are kind and forgive others. God will be kind and forgive them.

8. "Happy are those whose hearts are pure. One day they will see God.

9. "Happy are those who make peace. They are God's children.

10. "Happy are those who suffer for doing right. They will be in God's kingdom.

11. "Happy are those who follow Me, no matter what people say or do to them.

12. "Be glad because your name is written in heaven. God has a reward waiting for you along with the prophets who have suffered before you."

Jesus Keeps Teaching

13. Jesus went on to say, "You are like salt. But if salt loses its salty taste, it can't make food taste good or keep it from spoiling. It's good for nothing. People throw it away.

14. "Those who love God are like a city on a hill. Others can see by the way they live that they are good people.

15. "Those who love God are like candles. When you light a candle, you don't cover it up, but let it shine so everyone can see.

16. "Let your light shine by doing good things for others. They will thank God for you, and for what you do for them.

17. "Don't think that I've come to do away with the law of Moses or with the teachings of the prophets. I have come to help you understand what they said.

18. "Nothing in God's Word will ever change, not even a little. Heaven and earth will disappear before that ever happens.

19. "Whoever breaks God's law and teaches others that it doesn't matter does not have the approval of heaven.

20. "You can't get to heaven just by doing good things. Your heart must be changed.

21. "Everyone knows that if you kill someone, you're breaking the law and will be taken before a judge.

22. "Don't be angry and hate people. Don't even look down on others and call them names. If you do, how can God give you eternal life?

23-24. "Before you go to church to worship, make things right with others. If before giving your offering you remember that you have wronged someone, determine in your heart to go and ask forgiveness, and then give your offering.

25-26. "If someone doesn't like you and wants to make trouble, try to settle things quickly. If you wait, the police could get involved, and you might have to go to court or even to jail. And when you're in jail, then you'll be sorry, because it will cost you lots of money.

27-28. "Husbands and wives have been told to be true to each other, and that's right. But when they start thinking about someone else, they're already being unfaithful.

29-30. "Be willing to lose an eye rather than to sin. God can restore your eye, but if you really don't want to stop sinning, God can't take you to heaven. It is better to lose a hand than to continue sinning and lose heaven.

31-32. "Everybody knows that when married people want to get a divorce, they have to go to a judge. But if a husband or wife gets a divorce just so they can marry someone else, it's a

sin. They may remarry only if their partner has been unfaithful.

33. "Every time you say something, you don't need to swear that it's the truth. People expect you to tell the truth.

34-36. "Never take an oath to show that you're telling the truth, unless you must do so in front of a judge. Otherwise, don't swear by heaven or earth or Jerusalem to convince people that you're telling the truth. Don't swear by anything, because you should always tell the truth.

37. "When people ask if you'll do something, just say yes or no. Don't say you will do something and not mean it.

38-39. "If someone hurts you, don't try to get even by doing the same thing to him. If someone hits you, don't hit him back, even if he hits you twice.

40. "If someone tells you he'll beat you up unless you give him your coat, give it to him. Don't get into a fight. It's not worth it.

41. "If someone asks you to do something, do it, and even do a little more. He'll be surprised, and you'll even feel good.

42. "If someone you know wants to borrow something from you, lend it to him.

43-44. "Some people say that you should love your friends and hate your enemies. But I say, Love your enemies. Do nice things for those who are mean to you and pray for them. It's the right thing to do.

45. "When you do good things for others, it shows that you're God's children. That's what He does. He's good to everyone. He sends the rain on both good and bad people. He loves them all.

46-47. "If you're nice only to your friends, you're no different from anyone

else. It's easy to love those who are nice to us. So if you're friendly only to those who are kind, anyone can do that.

48. "You need to be like your heavenly Father who is kind to everyone."

6 Jesus continued teaching the people, saying, "When you do good things, don't brag about it. If you do, God can't reward you.

2. "When you bring an offering to church, don't show off. If you do, that will be the only reward you'll get for it.

3-4. "When you do good things, don't tell everyone about it. Your heavenly Father knows everything, even what you've done in secret, and He will reward you openly.

5. "Don't show off when you pray. Some people do that to get attention. That's all the reward they'll ever get.

6. "When you pray, just talk quietly to God. He will hear you and bless you for taking time to talk with Him.

7-8. "When you pray, don't keep saying the same thing again and again, as if God doesn't hear you. Don't be like those who repeat words without knowing what they are saying. Remember, He knows what you need before you put it into words.

9-13. "When you pray, say something like this: 'Our Father, in heaven, You are holy and good. May Your kingdom come. Help us to obey You, as the angels do. Please give us the food we need for each day. Forgive us and help us to forgive others. When we are tempted, help us not to sin. Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.'

14-15. "If you forgive others, God will forgive you. But if you don't forgive others, God cannot forgive you. That wouldn't be right.

16-18. "Some people not only pray; they also fast by skipping meals. But

they do it to get attention. If you decide to fast and spend time talking to God, that's fine. But don't show off so that everyone will know what you've been doing. Just dress and do things as you always do. Your heavenly Father knows all about it, and that's what matters. He will reward you for it. **19-20.** "Don't keep wishing you had lots of money so you can buy a lot of things. Things rust and decay, and sometimes thieves will steal what you have. Put God first in your life, and He'll have many good things waiting for you in heaven. No one can steal these things, and they won't ever get old or wear out.

21-24. "Whatever is on your heart, that's what you'll keep thinking about. It's the same with your eyes. Whatever you like to look at, that's what you'll think about. If you look at something bad long enough, you'll become bad, and your heart will be full of evil instead of good and happy things. You can't love God and evil at the same time. You'll have to decide which one comes first.

25-26. "Don't think about clothes and food all the time. There are other things to think about that are much more important. Look at the birds. Do they worry about clothes and food? No, they sing, because they know that God loves them. You're much more important to God than a bird is.

27-30. "Can you make yourself taller just by thinking about it? Of course not! Why worry so much about clothes? Look at how beautiful the flowers are. Do they sew and work at looking good? Yet they are more beautiful than a king in all his fine clothes. Now, if God is interested in flowers that live only a short time, how much more is He interested in you?

31-34. "So don't keep worrying about

what you will eat or drink or wear. Your heavenly Father knows all about you and what you need. Put God first in your life, and He will help you with whatever you need. And don't worry about tomorrow. Be close to God today, and take one day at a time. That's all God expects of you.

7 "If you criticize others, they will criticize you. God will judge you the same way that you judge others.

3-5. "Don't keep pointing out the little mistakes people make. No doubt you've made some big ones yourself. It's as if someone had a little speck in his eye, and you tried to remove it while you had a log in your eye. You need to take care of your own eye first; then you can see well enough to help others.

6. "Don't try to tell people about spiritual things if they don't want to listen, or they may turn against you.

7-8. "Ask, and God will help you. Look, and you will find Him. Knock on God's door, and it will open. Anyone who asks God for help will get it. Anyone who looks for the good will find Him. And anyone who knocks on God's door will see it open.

9-11. "Would a father give his son a stone if he asked for bread? Of course not! Would he give his son a snake if he asked for food? No! If parents give good things to their children when they ask, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to you when you ask Him! He loves you much more than they do.

12. "Be kind to other people, just as you want them to be kind to you.

13-14. "Don't follow the crowd. They are on a road that doesn't lead to heaven. Not many people are on the road to heaven. Walk on that road

even if it is difficult sometimes.

15-16. "Be careful to whom you listen. Some people act very kind, but then they tell you things that aren't true. You will soon find that their actions don't match God's ways. Do grapes or figs grow on thorn bushes?

17-19. "Good trees have good fruit, and weeds produce weeds. Fruit trees don't produce weeds, and weeds don't produce fruit. And fruit trees that produce bad fruit are cut down and used for firewood. That's all they're good for.

20. "You can tell a good tree from a bad one by the kind of fruit it has. It's the same with people. Good people do good things, and evil people do evil things.

21. "Everyone who talks about Me doesn't necessarily love Me. They may say they do, but God will take to heaven only those who love and obey Me.

22-23. "Some people may do great things supposedly for Me, even things that look like miracles, but they never really get to know Me. In the end I will have to tell them that they never gave Me a chance to know them.

24-25. "Those who obey Me are like the man who built his house on a rock. Heavy rains poured down. Flood waters rose. Strong winds blew and blew! But the house built on the rock stood firm.

26-27. "Those who say they love Me, but don't obey Me are like a man who built his house on sand. When the rains came and the winds blew, the house came crashing down."

28-29. When Jesus finished teaching, the people just sat there. They liked the simple way He said things, which was so different from the way the leaders and teachers said things. They could understand what Jesus

said. It gave them hope and courage and wasn't just a lot of hard-to-understand rules.

Jesus Heals People

8 Wherever Jesus went, people followed. Some were sick and had large sores on their bodies. One man knelt before Jesus and said, "Lord, if You want to, I know You can heal me." Jesus touched the man and said, "Of course I want to." And all the man's sores were gone!

4. Then Jesus said, "Don't tell anyone that I healed you until you first go to the Temple and give the priest your offering. Let him examine you. When he says you are healed, then people will accept it."

5-6. After this, Jesus went back to the city of Capernaum. While He was there, a Roman army officer sent Him this message: "Lord, my servant is sick and in terrible pain. Please make him well."

7-8. Jesus sent this message: "I will come and heal him." The officer went to meet Jesus and said, "Sir, I'm not good enough for You to come to my house. Just give the word, and my servant will be healed."

9. "I know You can do that. Even things in nature obey You, just as my soldiers obey me. I tell one of them to go, and he goes. I tell another one to come, and he comes. And my servant does whatever I tell him to do."

10-12. When Jesus heard this, He was amazed. He said, "This Roman officer has more faith in Me than many of My own people. Everyone who has faith in Me belongs to Me, no matter who they are. They will be with Me in My kingdom. Those who think they belong to Me but don't have faith in Me are in darkness. There will be no place in heaven for them."

13. Turning to the officer, Jesus said,

"Go home, and you'll find that your servant has been healed, just as you believed." And that's exactly what happened.

14-15. One day Peter invited Jesus to his house. When Jesus got there, He found that Peter's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. Jesus just touched her hand, and instantly her fever was gone. She then got up and helped prepare the dinner.

16. That evening many sick people were brought to Jesus to be healed. Some were controlled by demons. Jesus commanded the demons to leave, and they did. Then He healed all the people who had come.

17. This is what the prophet Isaiah had predicted years before when he said, "A Savior will come and heal all our diseases."

18. Jesus had no quiet time. Everywhere He went, people followed Him. So He decided to go to the other side of the lake to rest.

19-20. Before He left, a man came to Him and said, "Teacher, I'll follow You wherever You go." Jesus said, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but I don't have any place to call My own. Are you sure you want to follow Me?" The man didn't answer.

21-22. Someone else said, "Lord, I just got word that my father died. First, let me go home to help prepare for the funeral, and then I will come and follow You." Jesus said, "First, decide to follow Me. Let those who are spiritually dead make the funeral arrangements. You can go later."

23-24. Then Jesus went down to the shore and got into a fishing boat. He and His disciples headed across the lake. When they were about halfway across, a terrible storm came up. Within minutes the powerful waves began to wash over their boat, and

soon it was in danger of sinking. Now, Jesus was so tired that He had fallen asleep.

25-26. The disciples woke Him up, and said, "Lord, how can You sleep in such a storm? Do something, or we'll all die!" Jesus got up and said, "Why are you afraid? Don't you believe that God is watching over us?" Then He commanded the wind and the waves to stop. And they did!

27. When the disciples saw this, they were speechless. They said to each other, "What kind of man is this who can tell the wind and the waves to stop, and they do?"

28-29. When they reached the other side of the lake, two men controlled by demons came charging down the hill heading for Jesus. "Get out of here!" they shouted. "We don't want You! You're the Son of God and have come to punish us."

30-31. Some distance away there was a large herd of pigs eating. One of the demons shouted, "If you tell us to get out of these men, then let us go into the pigs on that hill."

32. Jesus said, "Go!" Then the demons left the two men and went into the pigs. All at once the pigs went wild. They ran down the hill into the lake and drowned.

33-34. When the men who had been taking care of the pigs saw what had happened, they ran back to the village and told the owners. Then the pig farmers and the whole village came out to see if it was true. But they weren't interested in what Jesus had to say. They told Him to go back where He came from.

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

9 So Jesus and the disciples quietly got into their boat and left for Capernaum.

2. Before long many sick people came to Jesus to be healed. One man was paralyzed. Jesus knew he was worried about his sins. So He said, "Son, cheer up, God has accepted your repentance. Your sins are forgiven."

3. When the leaders and teachers heard this, they said to themselves, "He's claiming to be equal with God by forgiving sins!"

4-7. Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "What was wrong with what I said? Is it easier to tell him, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to tell him, 'Stand up and walk'? If you don't know, let Me show you." He said to the paralyzed man, "Stand up and walk." Immediately the man stood up and started walking home.

8. People could hardly believe what they saw, and then they praised God for Jesus.

Jesus Invited to Dinner

9. One day, while He was walking through the city, Jesus saw a man named Matthew collecting taxes. Jesus said, "Matthew, come, follow Me." And he did.

10-11. Sometime later Matthew invited Jesus to dinner. He also invited some of his relatives and fellow tax collectors. The Jewish leaders didn't like tax collectors, and they were upset because Jesus was eating with them! So they asked Jesus' disciples, "Why does Jesus eat with such terrible people as tax collectors and other sinners?"

12-13. Jesus overheard it and said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor. Only those who are sick do. These people need help—that's why they came to see Me. God said, 'I want My people to be kind to others. That's more important than offerings.' God sent Me to help those who want to be

good, not those who think they are."

14-15. The followers of John the Baptist asked, "Why don't Your disciples fast, as we do?" Jesus replied, "Do people fast at a wedding? My being here is like a wedding. But when the leaders have Me arrested, then it will be time to fast and pray."

16. "People don't use new cloth to patch old clothes. Otherwise, when the clothes are washed, the patch will shrink and tear the old cloth, and the hole will be even bigger. I'm here to make people totally new, not just patch them up."

17. "You don't put fresh grape juice in old, cracked bottles. They would break. My teachings are like fresh grape juice. They need new bottles."

Jesus Works More Miracles

18-19. A man named Jairus, one of the church elders, came to Matthew's house to see Jesus. He bowed politely and said, "My little girl is dying. Please come and heal her before she dies." Jesus and His disciples followed Jairus.

20-22. While they were making their way through the crowd, a woman who had been sick for many years reached out to touch Jesus' robe. She believed that if she could just touch it, she would be healed. As soon as she did, Jesus stopped and said to her, "Don't be sad. Your faith has made you well." And she was healed.

23-24. When Jesus and His disciples got to Jairus' house, it was full of relatives and friends crying, because the little girl had died. Jesus said to the people, "In God's eyes the child isn't dead. She's just sleeping." But the people laughed.

25-26. When they left the bedroom, Jesus went in, took the little girl's hand and said, "My child, it's time to

wake up." Then she opened her eyes and sat up. The people were amazed. Soon everyone around there heard what had happened.

27-28. As Jesus left the house, two blind men followed Him, shouting, "Son of David, please help us!" They even followed Jesus into the house where He was going. He said, "Do you really believe that I can make you see again?" They answered, "Yes, we do!"

29-31. Jesus said, "As you believe, that's how it will be." He reached out and touched their eyes, and, just like that, they could see. Then He told them not to tell anyone about it, because more and more people would come to Him, and the leaders wouldn't like it. But as soon as the two men left, they told everyone they met that Jesus had healed them.

32-33. Then some people brought Jesus a man who was controlled by demons and couldn't talk. Jesus told the demons to leave the man alone. Suddenly the man could talk! People were amazed. "We've never seen anything like this before."

34-35. But the Jewish leaders in the crowd said, "He didn't heal this man by the power of God. It was by the power of the devil." Jesus didn't say anything, but went on His way, teaching, preaching, and healing.

36-38. As He looked at the people, He felt sorry for them, because they were like sheep with no shepherd. He said to His disciples, "There is so much to do. The harvest is very great, but there are so few workers. Pray that God will put more workers in the field to help gather the harvest."

The Twelve Disciples

10 Not only did Jesus heal the sick, but He gave His disciples power to do the same.

2-4. The twelve disciples were Peter and his brother Andrew, James and his brother John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, the other James, Thaddaeus, Simon, and Judas, who later betrayed Jesus.

5-7. These were the men Jesus sent out to teach, preach, and heal the sick. He said, "Don't preach somewhere else. Begin right here. Tell the local people about Me and God's kingdom."

8. "Show them how good God is by healing their diseases, casting out demons, and raising the dead. Do all this for free. You have freely received God's blessings, so freely give."

9-10. "Don't take money with you. Travel light. People will give you what you need."

11-13. "When you go to a city or a town, stay with those who appreciate what you're doing. Always be kind and grateful, but stay only where you are welcome."

14-15. "That goes for a city or town, too. If they don't want to listen, just quietly leave. Someday they will have a hard time explaining their actions to God."

16-18. "What you'll be doing won't be easy. You'll have to be very wise and use a lot of common sense. Just be careful. Some people will have you arrested and put in jail for what you're doing. You may be taken before governors or kings. If so, tell them about Me and the work that I have given you to do."

19-20. "Don't worry about what else you're going to say. God will tell you what to say. When that happens, you'll know that the Holy Spirit is helping you know what to say."

21-22. "Some in a family will believe what you say, and others will not. They may even turn against each other. You will be hated for following

Me. Just do your work and hold on to Me, and you'll have a place in heaven."

23. "When people give you a hard time in one place, go to another. You won't be able to get to every place before I finish the work I came to do."

24-26. "A student doesn't know more than his teacher, nor is a laborer above his boss. Good students obey their teacher. If some people don't like Me, don't be surprised if they don't like you, because you're My students. So don't be afraid of people like that. God knows everything they do."

27-28. "What I tell you privately, that's what you should preach publicly. Even if some people threaten to kill you, don't be afraid. They can't take away your eternal life. Only God has the power to give eternal life or to take it away."

29-31. "God knows everything, including when a bird falls to the ground. He even knows how many hairs are on your head. So don't worry. You're more important than many birds."

32-33. "If you're not ashamed to talk about Me, I won't be ashamed to introduce you to My Father in heaven. But whoever is ashamed of Me, I can't take to heaven."

34-37. "Sometimes the gospel divides people. Some will accept it; others will not. It can even divide families. Your own family members might even see you as their enemy. If they are more important to you than I am, how can I say that you're My disciples?"

38-39. "Anyone who isn't willing to bear some hurt for My sake doesn't really love Me. If all you think about is your own happiness, you'll never be happy. But if you forget yourself and think about pleasing Me, then you'll be happy."

40-42. "Anyone who welcomes you really welcomes Me. And anyone who

learns to love Me will love God, also. If people are good to you, God will reward them for it, even if it's only a small act of kindness, such as giving you a drink of water."

John the Baptist

11 After Jesus finished talking to His disciples, He went to other villages to preach and heal.

2-3. John the Baptist was put in prison because he had said that the king should repent of his sins. When John heard what Jesus was doing for the people, he sent two of his followers to see Him. When they found Jesus, they said, "Are You the Savior who is supposed to come and save us?"

4-6. Jesus said, "Watch what I do, and you'll get your answer. Then go back and tell John what you saw. The blind can see. The crippled can walk. Diseases are healed. The deaf can hear. The dead are raised. I'm preaching the good news of the kingdom. Tell John not to lose faith in Me."

7-9. After the two men went back to John, Jesus asked the people, "Why did you go to the Jordan River to hear John preach? You wanted to see and hear a prophet. John is more than a prophet; he's God's messenger to introduce the Messiah.

10. "He's the one the prophet Malachi spoke of when he said, 'A messenger will come to prepare the hearts of the people for the coming of the Messiah.'

11. "That's what God called John to do. But you are more privileged than he is, because you can hear Me preach and see everything I do. He can't, because he's in prison.

12. "John preached the coming of God's kingdom, and I am showing you what it's all about. Those who love God will take hold of it and never let it go.

13-15. "Everything that Moses and the

prophets said about Me points to this time. If you take John's message to heart, you'll know that he preached like Elijah, who asked people to make up their minds whom to serve, God or Baal. You have ears to hear, so listen to what I'm telling you.

16-17. "People today are like two groups of children playing games. One group says to the other, 'Nothing we play pleases you, whether we play happy songs or sad songs.'

18-19. "John preached a strong message, and some said it was too strong. Then I come along, and they say that I'm not strict enough because I forgive sins. People are wise enough to know the difference between what's right and what isn't."

20-22. Jesus was disappointed that so few people in Bethsaida, where He had preached and healed, accepted Him and changed their ways. He said, "If I had preached in cities like Tyre and Sidon, people would have accepted Me and changed. They will be judged differently from those of you who know Me but don't turn from your wicked ways.

23-24. "The city of Capernaum is full of pride. If cities like Sodom had heard Me and seen the miracles I have done here, people would have turned to God and changed. That's why other cities will be judged less harshly than the city where I have made My home."

25-26. Then Jesus raised His eyes toward heaven and said, "Father, thank You for holding back more truth from those who are proud, but sharing it with those who have the faith of little children. Thank You for Your wisdom."

27. Then Jesus said, "My Father has put Me in charge of things because He knows Me, and I know Him. So do

those who believe that the Father loves them.

28-30. "Come to Me if you're tired or worried, and I will give you rest. Accept My teachings, for I am gentle and kind. You'll find the rest you're looking for. My rules are simple and easy to follow."

Jesus and the Sabbath

12 One Sabbath morning Jesus and His disciples were passing by a wheat field. They hadn't had breakfast, so they picked some heads of wheat, rolled them in their hands so the kernels would come out, and ate them.

2. Some of the leaders and priests saw what the disciples were doing and said to Jesus, "Can't You see that they are breaking the Sabbath? They're harvesting!"

3-4. Jesus answered, "They're not harvesting; they're hungry. Haven't you read what David did when he was hungry? The high priest gave him some bread that belonged to the sanctuary and the priests. But God also said to feed the hungry. And David knew that.

5-6. "If you're worried about My disciples working on the Sabbath, don't you realize that priests work harder on that day than on any other? But they're doing God's work. I know what's right to do on the Sabbath and what isn't.

7. "In the Scripture God says, 'I want My people to be kind to others. That's more important than bringing Me offerings.' If you would remember that, you wouldn't always be judging people.

8. "God's Son is Lord of the Sabbath, and He's the one who made the rules."

9-10. The next Sabbath Jesus and His disciples went to the synagogue. A man with a paralyzed forearm and

hand was there. Some of the leaders were trying to find fault with Jesus. So they said, "If it's all right to help hungry people on the Sabbath, then why don't You heal this man's hand?"

11-12. Jesus said to the people, "What do you do when one of your sheep falls into a ditch on the Sabbath? Don't you get it out and take care of its wounds? This man is in pain too. It's not wrong to help someone like that on the Sabbath."

13-14. Then Jesus turned and said to the man, "Hold out your arm." As the man did so, his forearm and hand were healed. When the leaders saw this, they called a quick meeting to decide how to get rid of Jesus.

15-16. But Jesus knew what they had in mind, so He and His disciples left. A huge crowd followed Him, and He healed all those who were sick. He also told the people not to keep calling Him the Son of God, because it made the leaders even more determined to cut His work short.

17-21. Through Isaiah the prophet God had said, "Look at My Son. I have chosen Him to bring you the good news, and I am pleased with Him. He won't argue or shout, nor will He make long speeches in the streets. He will help those who are hurting. He will not turn from people, no matter how small their faith is. He will treat them fairly. People from everywhere will put their hope in Him."

Jesus Is Falsely Accused

22. The next day Jesus continued healing. They brought a man to Him who couldn't see, and whose speech was controlled by the devil. Jesus healed him, too.

23-24. When the people saw this, they said, "This must be the One we've been waiting for to come and save

us!" But the leaders said, "He's working miracles not by the power of God, but by the power of the devil."

25. Jesus said, "If an army is divided, and the troops start fighting among themselves, how can they win? It's the same with a city or a family—if they fight among themselves, how can they succeed?"

26-28. "If the devil fights against himself, how long can he last? So if I use the devil's power to cast out demons, what power do you use to cast them out? But if I cast out demons by God's power, then the power of God's kingdom is right in front of your eyes."

29. "God has to stop the devil from having his way. It's like a robber who ties up a strong man before he steals from the man's house. So the devil too must be tied up before I can take people away from him."

30. "If you try to stop Me, then you're against Me. And if you're against Me, you're against God's kingdom."

31-32. "Let Me tell you something. God can forgive anyone of anything. But if they don't let the Holy Spirit come into their hearts to help them change, how can God forgive them? God is willing to forgive. But if someone doesn't ask for forgiveness, how can God forgive him? That person is without hope."

33. "You need to make up your mind about Me. Is the work I do from God or not? A healthy tree will have good fruit, and a diseased tree, wormy fruit. If My work is from God, it will be good. If it's from the devil, it will be bad."

34-35. "If you're wicked enough to want to kill Me, how can you be speaking the truth? The mouth speaks what is in the heart. If a man's heart is good, he'll say good things. If his heart is bad, he'll say bad things."

36-37. "Whatever you decide, it's your

choice, and you'll be held responsible for it. Your own words will judge you, whether you're good or bad."

Jesus Continues Teaching

38. Then the leaders said to Jesus, "Show us a big miracle so we can know for sure that it's from God and not from the devil."

39-40. Jesus answered, "People who lack faith are always asking for proof. The greatest proof I will give you will be like what happened to Jonah. He was in the stomach of a huge fish for parts of three days and came out alive. The Son of God will be buried in a tomb for parts of three days, and He also will come out alive."

41. "People who believed Jonah's preaching changed their lives and were saved. But you've been listening to God's Son, and you still haven't changed. If those people were alive today, they would be surprised at your unwillingness to believe."

42. "When the queen of Sheba came to see King Solomon, she believed what he told her about God and was saved. If she were alive today, she too would be surprised at your unwillingness to believe."

43-45. "Do you realize that when a demon is cast out of a man's heart, he tries to find someplace to go? Later he checks out the heart he came from. If it's not full of love for Me, he gets other demons to join him and comes back. Then the man is worse off than before. So be careful not to leave your heart empty, or you too will be worse off than before you listened to Me."

46-47. Jesus was still talking to the leaders when His mother and step-brothers came to see Him. They couldn't get into the house where He was because of all the people. So they

passed word along that they wanted to see Him.

48-50. When His disciples told Him, Jesus answered, "My mother and stepbrothers are outside and want to see Me. But who is My real family? You are My real family. You are My brothers and sisters! Anyone who does what My Father says is My brother and sister and belongs to the family of God."

The Story of the Sower

13 Then Jesus went outside to see His mother and stepbrothers. They were worried that if He kept disagreeing with the leaders and priests, He would be arrested and killed. Jesus tried to explain, but they didn't understand. So He went down to the lake to get some peace and quiet.

2. But soon so many people came to see Him that they almost pushed Him into the water. So He got into one of the fishing boats and began telling them stories.

3. "Look. Up there on the hill a farmer is planting seeds. Once a farmer was sowing seeds like that.

4-7. "Some of the seeds fell on a path. The birds came and ate them. Some seeds fell on stony ground. They sprang up quickly, but the dirt wasn't very deep. The hot sun made the plants shrivel and die because their roots could not go down very far. Some seeds fell among weeds and thorns. They grew fast and soon choked the good seeds.

8-9. "But most of the seed fell on good soil, and the farmer usually had a good harvest. It brought him thirty, sixty, or even 100 times more than he had planted. Think about what I've said and learn a lesson about spiritual things."

10-11. When Jesus finished, His disciples said, "Why didn't You tell the people the meaning of the story?" Jesus answered, "Those who really want to know the meaning will find out. But those who don't want to know won't.

12-13. "The Holy Spirit will help those who really want to know. But those who don't will soon forget what I have said. The reason I use parables without explaining them is so that people will ask the Holy Spirit to help them understand.

14. "There will always be those whom the prophecy of Isaiah fits when he said, 'Some people will listen, but they won't understand. They will see what's happening, but won't be convinced, because their hearts are not right.

15. "They have ears, but they don't hear. They have eyes, but they don't see. And they don't ask God to help them, because they really don't want to change."

16-17. "But you're different. Your eyes see and your ears hear. You're also very privileged. The prophets, and many of My people, looked forward to this day and longed to see what you see and to hear what you hear.

18-19. "Now, let Me explain the parable of the sower to you. I am the farmer, and the field is the world. The seeds are the words of the gospel. The seed that fell on the pathway represents people who hear what I'm saying but don't understand it. The birds represent Satan. He's right there to take away what little the people hear.

20-21. "Some people get excited about the gospel, but they don't take it deep into their hearts, like the seed with little root that fell on stony ground. When trouble comes, they give up.

22. "As for the seed that fell among the thorns, that's like those who get

very excited about what they've heard. But the cares of life and the love of money choke their experience, and they soon forget all about Me.

23. "Then there are those who listen carefully to the good news and open their hearts to Me. They put Me first in all they do, because they love Me. And like the good seed, they produce a great harvest of many people who also love Me."

Stories of the Kingdom

24-26. Then Jesus told them another story. "The kingdom of God is like a farmer who sowed good seed in his field. But during the night, his enemy came and sowed weeds all over the farmer's field. When the good seed came up, so did the weeds.

27-28. "Then the field workers went to the owner and said, 'You gave us good seed to sow, but the field is full of weeds. Where did they come from?' The owner answered, 'My enemy has done this.' The workers replied, 'Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds before they get too big?'

29-30. "The owner said, 'No. If you pull up the weeds, some of the wheat will come up with them. Let them grow together until the harvest. Then we will separate them. We'll store the wheat and burn the weeds.'"

31-32. Then Jesus told the people another story. "God's kingdom is like a tiny mustard seed, which a man planted in his garden. The tiny seed sprouted and grew, until the plant became the tallest one in the garden. The birds thought it was a little tree, so they built their nests there."

33. Jesus said, "God's kingdom is also like yeast that people put in bread dough to make it rise. The yeast works quietly until the dough is ready for baking."

34-35. These are some of the stories Jesus told to help people understand God's kingdom. That's what the psalmist predicted when he said, "The Savior will use stories to help people understand the Scriptures."

36. Jesus and the disciples then went to a house where they had been invited for dinner. As they waited, the disciples said, "Lord, tell us the meaning of the parable about the wheat."

37-39. Jesus said, "The sower of the good seed is the Son of God. The field is the world, and the good seed are the people who love God. The weeds are the people who don't. The enemy who sowed weeds is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world, and the angels are the reapers.

40-41. "They will separate the weeds from the wheat. They'll bring the wheat home, but burn the weeds. This means that the angels will take out everything that's evil and sinful in the world.

42-43. "The wicked will cry when they realize that they will never live again. But the good people will be so full of joy you can't even imagine! They will live in God's house forever. Those who hear My parables need to listen with their hearts."

Three Short Parables

44. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is like buried treasure. One day a man found it and quickly covered it up. He sold everything he owned so he could buy that property.

45-46. "The kingdom of God is like a valuable pearl that a man found. He gave everything he had to buy it. That's how valuable I am to those who love Me, and they are to Me.

47-48. "The kingdom of God is also like fishing with a net. When fishermen draw in their net, they find both

good and bad fish in it. So they sort them out. They save the good fish and toss the bad ones back.

49-50. "That's how it will be at the end of the world. The angels will do the sorting. They will take those who love God and leave the others. The wicked will be burned up and their lives will end forever."

51. Then Jesus asked His disciples, "Do you understand what I'm trying to tell you?" They answered, "Yes, we understand."

52. Jesus said, "Those who love Me are like someone who has lots of precious things in his house, both old and new. They love God's old teachings, as well as the new meanings that I give them."

Jesus Visits His Hometown

53-54. After dinner Jesus thanked the people and left for His hometown of Nazareth. When He got there, He began teaching in the local synagogue. The people were amazed and said, "Where did He get all this wisdom and power to do what He does?"

55-56. "Isn't He the carpenter's son? We know His stepbrothers and sisters. They're no different than we are, so where did He get all this power?" Some were jealous and said, "He just came home to show off."

57. The more they thought about it, the more upset they got. Then Jesus said, "A prophet is treated with respect wherever he goes, except in his hometown."

58. Because they didn't accept Him for who He was, He didn't do many miracles there.

John the Baptist Killed

14 When King Herod died, another Herod became king. People told him about Jesus

and the miracles He was doing. The king said, "This must be John the Baptist come back to life. There's no other way to explain such miracles."

3-4. The reason the king said this is that he was the one who had arrested John and later had him killed. John had said that the king was wrong to take his brother's wife away from him and marry her.

5. Herod had not put John to death right away, because he was afraid the people would demonstrate. They loved John, and believed he was a prophet.

6-7. On Herod's birthday he had a big party and asked his stepdaughter to dance for the people. He was so proud of her. He said, "You did well. What would you like me to give you as a present? I'll give you whatever you ask."

8-11. Her mother had told her what to ask for. So she said, "Have John the Baptist killed and bring me his head." When the king heard that, he was shocked. But he didn't want to break his promise in front of all his guests. So he ordered John the Baptist killed and his head brought in. Then he gave it to the girl, and she took it to her mother.

12. The next morning John's followers went to the prison and asked for his body. After they had buried it, they told Jesus what had happened.

Jesus Feeds

Thousands of People

13-14. When Jesus heard what had happened to John, He was very sad. He got into a small fishing boat and crossed the lake to be alone. Some people followed Him in boats, while others walked around the lake to find Him. Jesus saw them coming and felt sorry for them. Many were sick and

needed His help. So He began teaching and healing them.

15. Late that afternoon His disciples said, "Master, we're way out here, and these people haven't had anything to eat all day. They're hungry. We really need to let them go to get something to eat."

16-18. Jesus said, "They don't need to go. You give them something to eat." The disciples said, "We can't feed all these people! All we have is five little loaves of bread and two fish." Jesus replied, "Let Me have those little loaves and two fish."

19-20. Then He asked the people to sit down. Looking up to heaven, He thanked God for the food, and asked Him to bless it. Then He gave some bread and fish to each disciple and asked them to pass it out to the people. And there was enough food for everyone! In fact, when the people finished eating, there were twelve basketfuls of fish and bread left over.

21. There were about 5,000 men there that day, not counting women and children.

Jesus Walks on Water

22-23. When the people realized what had happened, they wanted to make Jesus king. So Jesus told His disciples to get into their boat and go back across the lake. He would meet them there later. Then He told the people and the disciples to go home. After everyone was gone, He went up a nearby hill to pray.

24. When the disciples were about halfway across the lake, a storm hit. The waves grew big, beat against the boat, and the wind blew hard.

25. The disciples thought for sure that the boat would turn over and that they would drown. But Jesus

knew where they were. He walked down the hill where He had been praying and out onto the water, right in the middle of the storm.

26-27. When the disciples saw Him, they thought He was a ghost. They cried out to God to help them. Then Jesus called back, "Don't be afraid. I'm Jesus!"

28-29. Peter shouted, "Jesus! If that's You, let me walk on the water too!" Jesus called back, "Come!" So Peter jumped over the side of the boat, right into the waves, and started walking on the water!

30-31. But a huge wave came between him and Jesus, and Peter got scared. He started to sink and cried out, "Jesus! Help me! I'm sinking!" Jesus grabbed Peter's hand, pulled him up, and said, "Where is your faith? Why did you doubt?"

32-34. They walked back together, and as soon as they got to the boat, the storm stopped. The disciples were astonished at what they had seen. "Now we know that You are the Son of God!" Everyone in the boat worshiped Him. Just as the sun rose, they reached the other shore.

35-36. When the people saw who the men in the boat were and that Jesus was with them, they spread the word. Soon people came from everywhere bringing the sick with them. They asked Jesus to help them. They believed they would be healed, even if they only touched Him. And when they did, they were healed.

Being Evil Begins Inside

15 Some of the Jewish leaders had come from Jerusalem to ask Jesus some questions. They said, "Why don't Your disciples observe our Jewish traditions? They don't wash their hands up to their

elbows before they eat, as good Jews should."

3. Jesus said, "Why don't Jewish leaders keep God's law as they should? Why are you so concerned about the way to wash hands?"

4-6. "One of God's commandments says, 'Respect your father and mother and take care of them.' But you tell people that if they dedicate their money to the Temple, then they can't use it to take care of their parents. Even if their parents need money, they should not help them, because the money belongs to God. But that breaks the fifth commandment."

7-9. "The prophet Isaiah was right when he said, 'The time will come when people will talk a lot about God but won't really love Him. Their own rules will be more important than God's commandments.'"

10-11. Then Jesus said to the people, "Listen and understand what I have to say. It's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of his mouth. Whether he washes his hands as these leaders do or not is not important."

12. The disciples whispered to Jesus, "These leaders didn't like what You said. We think You hurt their feelings."

13-14. Jesus said, "People are like plants. Those not planted by My heavenly Father will have to be rooted up. So don't worry about the feelings of these leaders. They're like a blind man trying to lead another blind man. Neither can see where he's going, so they both fall into the ditch."

15-17. Peter asked, "Master, tell us what You meant about washing hands and eating." Jesus replied, "You too didn't understand what I said? What you eat goes into your stomach, and through your intestines, and then comes out of the body."

18-20. "But what a person says comes from the way he thinks. If you have bad thoughts, you will say and do bad things. Bad things such as lying, stealing, being unfaithful, and murder all start in the heart. These are the things that defile a person, not whether or not he washed his hands up to his elbows."

Jesus Answers a Mother's Prayer

21. Then Jesus decided to leave the area and go visit a neighboring country.

22. While He was there, a mother came to Him crying. She said, "Teacher, please help me! My daughter is being controlled by the devil, and we don't know what to do!"

23. Jesus paid no attention to her. He did this to show the disciples how it looked when they treated foreign people that way.

24-26. Jesus said to the mother, "They tell Me I'm not supposed to help you because you're a foreigner." The mother fell on her knees and begged Jesus to please help her. Jesus said, "No one takes food from the family table to feed strange dogs that roam the neighborhood."

27-28. The mother answered, "That's true, but people do feed their pets from the family table." Jesus said, "Your faith in Me is strong. Your daughter is healed." Then the disciples realized that Jesus was telling them to be kind to everyone and help them, no matter where they come from.

Jesus Again Feeds Thousands

29-31. Then Jesus returned to His own country and stopped to rest on a hill beside a lake. But soon people found Him and brought the lame, the blind, the mute, and many others to

Him. And Jesus healed them all. The people were amazed and praised God for Him.

32. After teaching and healing for almost three days, Jesus said to His disciples, "The people haven't eaten much since they came. We can't send them away hungry. Some have a long way to go."

33-34. The disciples asked, "Where are we going to get food enough to feed all these people?" Jesus replied, "Don't we have something to give them?" They answered, "All we have is seven little loaves of bread and a few fish."

35-37. Jesus told the people to sit down. Then He took the bread and fish, thanked God, and asked Him to bless them. He gave the loaves and fish to the disciples to give to the people, and they had plenty to eat. After they had finished, the disciples picked up seven baskets full of leftovers.

38-39. Jesus fed more than 4,000 men that day, not counting women and children. Then He told the people that it was time to go home. He got into a fishing boat and crossed to the other side.

Jesus Warns His Disciples

16 When the local leaders heard that Jesus was in their area, they decided to go see Him and ask Him to show them a miracle to prove that He really was the Son of God. **2-3.** Jesus said to them, "When you see a red sky in the evening, you say that tomorrow will be a pretty day. When you see a dark sky in the morning, you say it looks like rain. If you can look at the sky and understand what it means, why can't you understand the times you are living in?"

4. "You don't really want to know who I am. Because if you believe I'm the Son of God, then you should do what I say.

God Himself will give you a sign. Something will happen to Me similar to what happened to Jonah, who was buried in the stomach of a big fish for parts of three days and came out alive." Then Jesus and His disciples left.

5-6. By now they were hungry, but they had forgotten to bring bread along. Jesus said to them, "Be careful not to eat the bread the Jewish leaders give you."

7-8. The disciples thought He meant the kind of bread the leaders ate. Jesus knew what they were talking about, so He asked, "Why do you think I was talking about bread?"

9-11. "Have you forgotten that we fed 5,000 men plus women and children with just five loaves of bread and two fish? Remember all the leftovers? Then we fed 4,000 with only seven loaves of bread just a few days ago? How many baskets of leftovers did you have? No, I'm not talking about food."

12. Then the disciples understood that Jesus wasn't talking about the bread you eat, but about the false teachings of the Jewish leaders.

Jesus Talks About His Death

13-14. Then Jesus and His disciples went to Caesarea Philippi. On the way He asked them, "Who do people think that I am?" They answered, "Some think you're John the Baptist come back to life. Others think you're the prophet Elijah, or Jeremiah, or some other prophet."

15-17. Jesus asked, "But who do you think I am?" Peter spoke up, "You're the Son of God!" Jesus replied, "Bless you, Peter. You spoke from your heart. My Father has revealed to you who I am."

18. "But don't feel proud. You are only a little rolling stone. It's on His Son, the Rock, that God will build His

church. The forces of evil will go against it, but they will not win.

19-20. "God's Word is like a key to heaven. If you do things according to the Bible, you'll be doing things heaven will approve. If not, then heaven can't approve what you do. Now, don't tell people who you think I am. This is not the time to do that."

21-22. Then Jesus told them that He would be arrested and killed, but that on the third day He would come back to life. When Peter heard that, he said, "We won't let this happen to You! Don't talk that way!"

23. Jesus said, "Peter, you're saying what Satan wants you to say. Trying to defend Me will only make things worse. A minute ago you were on God's side; now you're on Satan's side."

24. Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Forget the idea that I'm here to drive the Romans from your country. I came to drive sin out of people's hearts. If anyone wants to be My disciple, he must be willing to carry a cross for Me."

25-26. "Those who put this life first will lose their lives. But those who put eternal life first will be glad they did. What good is it if someone has all the money in the world and then loses out on heaven?"

27-28. "When I return, I will come with the angels of heaven and will be surrounded by My Father's glory. Then I'll give eternal life to all who love Me. In a little while I'll give some of you a glimpse of My coming."

A Glimpse of Jesus' Second Coming

17 Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the top of a nearby mountain to pray. While He was praying, suddenly His face became as bright as the sun, and His robe glowed as white as light.

3-4. Then Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Jesus. When Peter saw it, he exclaimed, "Lord, this is a special mountain! We need to build three holy places up here, one each for You, Moses, and Elijah."

5-6. Before Peter could finish, they were all enveloped in a brilliant cloud of light. From inside the cloud a voice spoke. "This is My Son. I love Him and am very pleased with what He's doing. Listen to Him." When the disciples heard God's voice, they threw themselves on the ground and covered their faces, for they were very afraid.

7-8. They were still shaking when Jesus touched them and said, "You may get up. You don't need to be afraid of God." When they looked, no one was there but Jesus, and He looked as He always had.

9-10. As they went down the mountain, Jesus said, "Don't tell anyone what you saw until after My resurrection." The disciples asked, "But don't the religious teachers say that Elijah must first announce the setting up of the Messiah's kingdom?"

11-13. Jesus answered, "That's true, but not the way the leaders and teachers understand it. In a sense, Elijah has already come and announced My kingdom. But the people didn't recognize him, and killed him. Now they're planning to kill Me." Then the disciples understood that Jesus was talking about John the Baptist.

Jesus Heals a Boy

14-16. When Jesus and His disciples came down from the mountain, a father came running to Jesus. He fell on his knees and pleaded, "Jesus, have mercy on my son. He has no control over himself. Sometimes he throws himself into the fire and sometimes into the water. I brought

him to Your disciples to heal him, but they couldn't."

17. Jesus quietly said to His disciples, "Oh, how your faith needs to grow! I will not be here much longer to teach you." Then He said to the father, "Bring the boy here."

18. When the father brought his son, the demon threw him down right in front of Jesus. Then Jesus told the demon to leave the boy. The demon obeyed, and the boy was healed.

19-21. Later the disciples asked Jesus why they couldn't heal the boy. Jesus answered, "You had too much faith in yourselves and not enough in God. If you had true faith, even as small as a mustard seed, you could move mountains. No problem is too big for God. However, casting out demons takes a lot of fasting and prayer and humbling yourself before God."

22-23. "Right now I want you to think about what will soon happen to Me. Someone will go to the priests and tell them where to find Me when I'm not surrounded by people. I'll be arrested and killed, but on the third day I'll come back to life." The disciples felt terrible. They couldn't believe that this could happen.

Jesus and Taxes

24. At the next town they were stopped by tax collectors. One of them said to Peter, "Doesn't your Teacher pay the Temple tax as the rest of the people do?"

25. Peter said, "Of course He does!" Later, when Jesus and His disciples were eating lunch at someone's house, Jesus said, "Peter, from whom do kings collect taxes? From their own family or from the people?"

26. Peter said, "From the people, of course." Jesus said, "That's right. The king's family doesn't have to pay taxes.

And prophets and priests who work for God don't have to pay Temple taxes.

27. "But so as not to cause trouble, let's just pay it. Peter, go down to the lake, catch a fish, and open its mouth, and in it you'll find a gold coin. Take it and go pay the Temple tax for both of us." So Peter did.

The Value of Heaven

18 Then the disciples asked Jesus, "What makes a person great in God's sight?" Jesus called a little child to come to Him, and took him in His arms.

3-4. He said, "Unless your hearts are changed to love and trust God the way this little child loves and trusts his parents, God can't take you to heaven. To love and depend on God, you must ask Him to help you. That will make you great in the sight of heaven."

5-7. "Little children like this are precious in the sight of God, and so are new believers. You need to love them. If anyone causes a child to lose faith in Me, it will be very bad for that person. Woe to anyone who destroys people's faith in Me, especially the faith of new believers."

8. "You need to get rid of everything that keeps you from loving God and depending on Him, even if it's something as valuable as your hand or foot. To be in heaven is more important."

9. "If your eyes keep looking at things you shouldn't, do whatever is necessary to overcome evil. Think about loving God and being with Him. You don't want to die forever, as the wicked will."

The Lost Sheep

10-11. "I want you to understand that children are important to God. He sends angels to watch over them and help them. And their angels always

see the face of My Father in heaven. I have come to save everyone, whether they're young or old.

12-14. "If a man has 100 sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? He will ask someone to watch the others while he goes to look for the one lost sheep. And when he finds it, he is happier over this one sheep than over all the others, because it's no longer lost. That's how it is with God. His heart longs for everyone who is lost, whether they're adults or children.

Forgiveness

15-17. "If someone does something sinful to you, go to him privately and talk things over. But if he won't listen, take one or two elders with you who know what happened. If he still doesn't listen, then go to the church leaders. If he still doesn't listen, he should not belong to the church until he changes.

18-20. "You know the things that heaven approves and disapproves. So follow heaven's plan and do what's right. If two of you agree to pray about something according to God's will, He will answer your prayers. For where two or three of you meet together in My name, I'll be right there with you."

21-22. Then Peter said, "How many times should I forgive someone? Is seven times enough?" Jesus answered, "It's not the number of times that's important, but your attitude. If your attitude is right, you'll forgive someone seventy times if you have to.

23-25. "God's kingdom is like a king who went to see how his servants were doing. He found that a high official had stolen a huge sum of money from him. And the man had spent it all. Now, in that country, if a man couldn't pay back what he stole, the

king would put him in jail, take his property, and sell his family as slaves. **26-27.** "The man fell on his knees and pleaded, 'Please, give me a chance! I promise you I will pay it back.' The king felt sorry for him and said, 'I forgive you. So forget about what you owe me.'

28-30. "Then the official went to see a man who owed him money. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded that he pay him right away. The man fell on his knees, begged for forgiveness, and promised to pay him back. But the official refused to listen. Instead, he had the man thrown in jail.

31-33. "The king's servants heard about it and told the king. The king called in this official. 'You really deserve to be punished,' he said. 'I forgave you all that money you stole, and even gave you back your job. Why didn't you forgive the man who owed you money? Why weren't you as good to him as I was to you?'

34-35. "The king was really upset. He had no choice but to throw the man in jail until he or someone else paid all the money he owed. That's what God will have to do to those who don't forgive others."

Marriage and Divorce

19 After that, Jesus decided to cross the Jordan River and go on down to Jerusalem. Again, crowds followed Him. Some of the people were sick, but He healed all of them.

3. In the crowd were leaders and teachers who had come to ask questions, trying to get Him to say something they could use against Him. "Is it right for a man to divorce his wife whenever he wants to?" they asked.

4-6. Jesus answered, "Haven't you read what the Bible says about mar-

riage? God created man and woman to be husband and wife. He planned that they stay together. When men and women get married, they leave their parents to have their own home. In God's sight they are now like one person. So when God unites them like that, no one should separate them."

7. They said, "Then why did Moses let people get divorced if they would put it in writing?"

8-9. Jesus said, "Moses did that because men were asking their wives to leave for any little thing they did wrong. That wasn't right. He did the best he could to stop it by requiring a written statement. Any man who divorces his wife, or woman who divorces her husband, to marry someone else, is sinning. Those who approve this kind of thing are also sinning."

10. Then the disciples said, "Lord, if that's how You feel about marriage and divorce, maybe it's better not to get married."

11-12. Jesus answered, "If you can't take the responsibilities of marriage, then don't get married. Some can and some can't. There are many reasons people choose not to get married. Some decide to stay single so they can give more time to spreading the gospel. Each one has to decide for himself."

Jesus Talks About Heaven

13-15. Some mothers brought their children for Jesus to pray for them and bless them. The disciples didn't want the mothers to bother Jesus, so they asked them to leave. But Jesus said, "Don't stop the mothers from bringing their children to Me. Heaven belongs to such people as these children. Let them come." As they came, Jesus prayed for them and blessed them. Then He left that area.

16-17. A rich young man came to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good things can I do to make sure I get to heaven?" Jesus replied, "You have to be good inside as well as outside. Only God can do that for you. But you can start by keeping the commandments."

18-19. The young man said, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "The Ten Commandments. They tell you what's right: don't lie, steal, kill, or be unfaithful. They tell you to respect your parents and help your neighbor."

20-22. The young man said, "I've done those things all my life, but something still seems to be missing inside of me." Jesus' heart went out to the young man, and He said, "If you want to be sure of heaven, sell what you have and give it to the poor. Then come and follow Me." But the young man didn't want to give up all his things, so he turned and walked away.

23-24. Jesus said to His disciples, "This young man loves his riches more than he loves God. The problem is with his heart, not with the things he owns. That's true of many rich people. It would be easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven while clinging to his riches."

25-27. The disciples were surprised. They had been told that rich people were closer to God. They asked, "If rich people can't get to heaven, then how can poor people like us have a chance?" Jesus answered, "God can help anyone get to heaven. He loves all people, rich and poor." Peter said, "Do we qualify? We've left everything to follow You."

28-30. Jesus replied, "Yes, I know you have left everything to follow Me. When I return to set up My kingdom, you'll be there to help Me. Anyone who leaves everything for My sake

will have joy in his heart here, plus eternal life in heaven. Many people who expect to be in heaven won't be there. Others that no one thinks will be there will be."

Getting Paid What's Fair

20 Jesus said, "God's kingdom is like the man who needed people to work in his vineyard. At six o'clock in the morning he found some men who wanted a job. He told them how much he would pay them for one day's work, and they agreed. Then he sent them into his vineyard to work.

3-4. "By nine o'clock he realized he needed more workers. So he went and found some more men looking for work. He offered to pay them a fair wage, and they agreed. Then he sent them to work in his vineyard.

5. "Soon he realized that he needed still more workers. At twelve o'clock and again at three o'clock he went to the marketplace for more workers. He offered to pay them what was fair, and they all agreed. Then he sent them into his vineyard to work.

6-7. "As late as five o'clock he went to get still more workers. When he found some, he asked, 'Haven't you found any work today?' They answered, 'No one has hired us.' The farmer said, 'You're hired. Come with me and help finish the harvesting. I'll pay you what's fair.' They agreed.

8-9. "When the work was done, the farmer told his supervisors to call the men together and pay them, starting with the last workers first. Each man was paid what the first men were promised.

10. "The first ones got excited, because they thought that if the farmer paid the last ones that much, they would get even more. But he paid

them all the same. Then the first ones got upset.

11-12. "They told the farmer that he was unfair and said, 'These men came last and worked only a few hours, and you paid them as if they had worked all day. But we worked through the heat of the day, and you paid us only the same as you paid them!'

13-15. "The farmer asked, 'Why do you say that I was unfair? Didn't I pay you what we had agreed to? Be glad someone hired you. Take your pay and be happy. I decided to pay everyone the same. Don't I have a right to do what I want with my own money? Don't be jealous because I'm generous. Be glad that these workers could help finish the harvest!'

16. Then Jesus said, "That's how it will be at the end. The first will be last, and the last first. Some work for what they can get, while others work because they love Me."

Jesus Goes On to Jerusalem

17-18. Jesus and His disciples continued on their way, and lots of people followed them. At one place Jesus decided to rest. He said to His disciples, "When we get to Jerusalem, someone will turn Me over to the priests, who will have Me arrested and sentenced to death.

19. "Then they'll turn Me over to the Roman soldiers, who will mock Me, beat Me, and crucify Me. But on the third day I'll come back to life." Even though the disciples had heard Jesus say this before, they still didn't believe it could happen.

20-21. While they were resting, the mother of James and John came to Jesus to request a favor. Jesus asked, "What would you like Me to do for you?" She answered, "Lord, when You set up Your kingdom, could You have

my two sons sit next to You, one on the right and the other on the left?"

22-23. Jesus said, "I know you love your sons and want the best for them, but are they willing to suffer and die for Me?" When James and John heard that, they replied, "Yes, we would do that!" Jesus answered, "I know you're willing to suffer for Me, and you will. But who will sit on My right and left in My kingdom is not for Me to decide, but My Father."

24-25. When the other disciples heard what James and John wanted, they were angry. Then Jesus called them together and said, "You know how people like to tell others what to do. The more others do for them, the more important they think they are."

26-28. "Things are different in My kingdom. God measures people by what they do for others, not by what others do for them. If you want to be important in God's sight, be willing to serve others. This is what heaven is all about. In God's kingdom everyone cares about everyone else. I have not come to exercise authority over people, but to help them and even to die for them."

Jesus Heals Two Blind Men

29. Then Jesus and His disciples left Jericho to go to Jerusalem. As usual, lots of people followed them.

30-31. Two blind men were sitting beside the road begging. When someone told them that Jesus was coming, they cried out, "O Lord, son of David, have mercy on us!" Some tried to quiet them, but they shouted even louder, "Lord, help us! Have mercy on us!"

32-34. Jesus stopped and asked, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said, "Lord, please help us to see again." Jesus' heart went out to them. He touched their eyes, and im-

mediately they could see. Then the two men praised God as they followed Jesus to Jerusalem.

Jesus Rides a Donkey

21 As Jesus and His disciples came close to Jerusalem, they stopped at a village by the Mount of Olives. He said to two of His disciples, "Go into the village and find a donkey and her grown colt. Untie them, and bring them here. If someone stops you, tell him, 'The Lord needs to borrow them.' The owner will let you have them."

4-5. This is what the prophet Zechariah had predicted: "Look, your King is coming! He is humble and riding on a donkey."

6-7. They brought the donkey and her grown colt to Jesus. They suspected that He was going to ride the young donkey as a new King would do to announce his rulership. So they spread their coats on the donkey for Jesus to sit on.

8-9. The people knew what this meant. They spread their coats on the road and laid down palm branches for the donkey to walk on. Some walked ahead and some behind Jesus. They started singing, "The Son of David will save us. He comes in the name of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Praise His name forever!"

10-11. By the time they reached Jerusalem, the whole city was excited. People came running from everywhere asking, "Who is this?" Those with Jesus said, "This is Jesus, a prophet of God from Nazareth."

12-13. When Jesus reached the Temple, He went in. Men were selling sheep. Others were exchanging money for Temple money. Jesus told These men to stop cheating people. When they refused to stop, He tipped over their

money tables and untied the sheep. He said, "This should be done outside. God's house is a place of prayer, not a place to do crooked business."

14. After the sellers and money-changers left, the blind and handicapped came to Jesus, and He healed all of them.

15. The religious leaders and teachers saw what Jesus was doing and heard children singing, "Blessed be the Messiah, the Son of David!" This really upset them.

16. They said to Him, "Don't You hear what these children are singing? They're calling You the Messiah!" Jesus answered, "Yes, I hear them. Have you not read what the Bible says? 'True praise most often comes from the mouths of children.'"

17-18. Then Jesus left the Temple. He went to the nearby village where his friend Lazarus lived with his sisters, Mary and Martha. The next morning before breakfast, Jesus and His disciples started back to Jerusalem.

19-20. They were hungry. When Jesus saw a fig tree, He stopped to pick some fruit. But all it had was leaves. He said to the tree, "Since you look as if you have figs, but you don't, you'll never fool people again." As soon as He said that, the tree started to die. The disciples were shocked and said, "Look! The leaves are falling off the tree!"

21-22. Jesus said, "Israel is like this fig tree. It's not producing fruit. If you love God and have faith in Him, you too can do unusual things. If you have faith, and God wants you to, you can move a mountain into the sea. So when you pray, believe that He hears you. And be ready for Him to answer in ways you least expect."

23. When Jesus and His disciples reached the Temple, the priests came to Him and said, "Who gave You the

authority to drive the sellers and money changers out of the Temple?"

24-25. Jesus replied, "Let Me ask you a question first. Then I'll answer yours. By whose authority did John baptize—his own authority or God's?" The priests talked among themselves saying, "If we say that John baptized on God's authority, He'll say, 'Then why didn't you do what he told you to do?'"

26-27. "If we say John did it on his own authority, the people won't like it, because they believe that John was a prophet." They turned to Jesus and said, "We can't answer Your question." Jesus replied, "So I don't have to answer Yours."

The Parable of Two Brothers

28-29. Then Jesus asked, "What do you think about this? A father had two sons. He went to one of them and said, 'Son, could you go and help the harvesters?' The son answered, 'I'm busy. I can't.' But then he thought it over and changed his mind and went.

30-31. "The father said to the other son, 'Son, could you go and help with the harvest?' The son answered, 'Sure, Father; I'll be happy to go.' But he didn't go. Which of these two sons obeyed the father?" They answered, "The first one." Jesus replied, "You're right. That's why bad people who change their ways will get into heaven before you.

32. "John preached what was right, but you wouldn't listen. You saw bad people listen to John and change their ways. But even then you didn't accept his message."

The Parable of a Farmer

33-34. Jesus told another story. "A wealthy man owned a vineyard. He put a fence around it, made a winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he

rented it out and left on business. When it was time for the harvest, he sent some of his servants to collect his share of the harvest as rent.

35-36. "But the renters beat up one, stoned another, and killed another. Then the owner sent some more servants, but the renters treated them the same way.

37-40. "Finally the landowner decided to send his own son. He said, 'I know they'll respect my son.' But when they saw the son coming, they said, 'He's the owner's only son. Let's kill him. Then the vineyard will belong to us.' So that's what they did. What do you think the landowner will do to these men?"

41. The priests answered, "The owner will have the evil renters arrested and tried for murder. Then he'll get other renters to look after his vineyard."

42-43. Jesus said, "Haven't you read in the Scriptures how the Temple builders rejected the stone that would fit the corner? The Temple stone and the landowner's son represent Me. If you reject Me, My Father will give His vineyard to people who know how to take care of it.

44. "I am the Cornerstone. He who accepts Me will feel sorry for his sins, and God will forgive him. But he who does not, God will have to let him die with the wicked."

45-46. After listening to these parables, the priests knew that Jesus was talking about their plans to kill Him. They would have arrested Jesus right then, but they were afraid, because the people loved Jesus and believed in Him.

The Parable of the Wedding

22 Jesus told the people another story. "The way God decides who will get to heaven is like a wedding. The king's

son was getting married, so the king planned a big wedding.

3-4. "He sent his servants to tell those who had been invited to the wedding to come to it, but they weren't willing to come. Then when it was time for the wedding to begin, the king said to his servants, 'Go, tell my invited guests to come quickly, because everything is ready.'

5-7. "But some people were too busy buying, selling, and farming. Others actually mistreated the king's servants and, in some cases, killed them. When the king heard about this, he sent his soldiers out to catch those murderers.

8-10. "Then he said to his servants, 'The banquet is ready, but those who don't want to come don't deserve to be here. Go out and invite anyone you see to come and celebrate my son's wedding with me.' So the servants went out and invited everyone they could. Soon the place was full.

11-12. "Then the king came in to welcome the guests, and to make sure everyone was wearing the special clothes he had provided. One man was wearing his own everyday clothes. The king said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without wearing wedding clothes?' The man didn't know what to say, because he had no excuse.

13-14. "Then the king said to his servants, 'Take this man to the door and tell him to leave.' The man cried and begged, but it was no use. Many are invited to the wedding of God's Son, but some are asked to leave because they're not wearing the wedding clothes He provided."

15. After hearing this, the priests left and decided to trap Jesus into saying something they could use to have Him arrested.

16-17. So they sent some of their smartest young men along with

those who favored the Roman government to question Jesus. They said to Him, "We know that You're honest and teach people what's right. Tell us, is it right for us to pay taxes to the Roman government?"

18-19. Jesus knew why they asked that. He replied, "Why are you trying to trap Me into saying something you can use against Me? Let Me see a Roman coin that you use to pay taxes." So they gave Him one.

20-22. He pointed to the coin and said, "Whose picture is this?" They said, "The emperor of Rome." Jesus said, "Give the emperor what belongs to him, and give God what belongs to Him." When they heard that, they were surprised. They hadn't expected such a simple answer.

23-24. Later that day other leaders came to trap Jesus. These were a group of men who didn't believe in the resurrection. They said, "Teacher, Moses told us that if a man dies and has no children, his wife should marry someone from the same family so no one can take her property."

25-26. "We know a family with seven boys. The first one got married, but soon died without having children. So his wife married one of his brothers, but he got killed. So she married another of the brothers, and so on."

27-28. "Finally, the woman died without having children. If there is a resurrection, whose wife will she be in heaven?"

29-30. Jesus said, "You don't understand God's power. You need to know what the Scriptures say. Have you ever thought that things in heaven might not be exactly as things are here? Angels don't get married and are very happy."

31-32. "When you think there's no resurrection, you need to first think about

what God can do. Haven't you read in the Scriptures what God said about Himself? He said, 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' He can create life as He did for Sarah, who was too old to have a baby."

33. When the people heard Jesus' answer, they were amazed at His wisdom.

34-36. Then the priests and leaders decided to send a lawyer to trap Jesus. He asked Jesus, "Teacher, which commandment do You think is most important?"

37-40. Jesus answered, "You should love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. This is the first and most important commandment. And the next one is just like it. You should love others as much as you love yourself. All the other commandments hang on these two. You can't separate them."

41-42. Then Jesus turned to the leaders standing nearby and asked, "Whose family will the Messiah come from?" They answered, "David's family."

43-45. He said, "If that's the case, why did David call Him Lord? He said in the Psalms, 'God will let my Lord use His power and sit next to Him in heaven.' Now, if David called the Messiah Lord, how can the Messiah also be part of his family?"

46. The priests and leaders didn't have an answer. So they left and didn't try to trap Jesus again.

Jesus Warns the People

23 Jesus said to His disciples and others standing nearby, "The priests and religious teachers are called to teach you as Moses did. So do what they tell you, but do it for the right reason. They not only do it for the wrong reason, but don't even practice what they preach. They make up all kinds of rules that

God never gave. And the people have a hard time keeping all of them.

5-7. "These priests walk around with Bible verses tied to their foreheads to show off how spiritual they are. They like to come to religious festivals and sit at the head of the table where everyone can see them. They love to have people call them by the titles they have.

8-10. "Don't let people put you on a pedestal. Just let people call you by your name, for you are all brothers and sisters. Don't call anyone Father in a spiritual sense. There's only one Father, and that's God in heaven. Don't try to be in charge of people's lives. There's only One who's in charge of people, and that's God's Son. He came to save them, not to control them.

11-12. "If you want to be great, then be kind to everyone and help those who are in need. If you put yourself first, you'll end up last. But if you put others first, people will enjoy knowing you."

13. Then Jesus turned to the priests and said, "You think you love God, but your attitude turns people away. You're not really helping people get to heaven. You're just interested in yourselves.

14-15. "You're supposed to teach people to keep God's commandments, but you don't. You tell people to sell their houses and give all they have to the Temple so you can use it. You're willing to do anything to have someone accept your beliefs. But you teach him to be more like you than like God.

16-22. "You're blind. You tell people that making a pledge in the name of the Temple or the altar means nothing, but making a pledge in the name of its gold or in the name of the sacrifice on the altar means everything. How foolish can you be? Even if someone just makes a pledge in the name of heaven, he's making a pledge to God.

23-24. "You teach people to pay tithe on the herbs they grow in their gardens, but you don't teach them to love God and be kind to others, which are more important. You are like a person who strains a gnat out of his drinking water and swallows a camel. You're careful about what you eat, but you fill your life with selfishness.

25-28. "You keep showing off, but don't see that inside you're thieves and gluttons. You need to clean your own hearts first; then your thoughts and actions will be right. The way your lives are now makes you almost hopeless. You appear to be like beautifully polished tombstones, but down below is a grave full of dead men's bones.

29-30. "You're careful to take care of the graves of the prophets. You talk about how good they were. And that if you had lived when they did, you would have listened to them and would not have killed them.

31-34. "So you're admitting that God's people can get angry and kill their own prophets. That's actually what you're planning to do to Me. You're very shrewd. How can you expect God to approve what you're doing? Even if you kill Me, that won't satisfy you. Others will teach the truth after Me, and you'll have them arrested and killed.

35-36. "Your country will suffer because of what you're doing, as well as what priests and leaders before you did to those prophets. Jerusalem will be destroyed soon after you kill Me."

37-38. Then Jesus looked at the city and said, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I love you even if you have killed some of the prophets. I want to protect you, like a mother hen protects her baby chicks. But you have turned against Me and don't want My help. Soon

you'll be destroyed, and your Temple will be empty.

39. "But when I come back, those who love Me will be excited to see Me. They will look up and say, 'Praise the Lord! He has come to take us home.'"

Jesus Talks About the End

24 As Jesus left the Temple, His disciples pointed with pride to its beautiful structure and remarked how large it was. Jesus replied, "Take a good look, because it soon will be gone. Not one of those huge stones will be on top of another."

3. After they got to the top of the Mount of Olives just outside the city, the disciples asked, "When will these things that You just told us about happen? When will You come back?"

4-5. Jesus answered, "What's important is for you not to be deceived. Many preachers will come claiming to speak for Me, and people will believe them.

6-8. "Also, before the end comes, there will be all kinds of trouble and many wars. But don't be discouraged. God must let these things happen. There will be wars, famines, and earthquakes in many places. These are signs that My coming is not far away. It's just like a mother who can tell when her baby is ready to be born.

9-10. "People will be mean to those who believe in Me. You will even be hated. Those who say they love Me, but really don't, will not love you.

11-13. "False preaching and prophesying will go on everywhere. Evil in the world will increase, and most people will not act in loving ways. But those who really love Me will hold on to Me and will not give up. They will be saved.

14. "The good news of the gospel will be preached all over the world. After that, I'll come back.

15-18. "If you want to know what will happen to Jerusalem, read what Daniel says. He talks about foreign armies surrounding the city. When you see that happen, it's time to leave. You won't have time to stop and pack. If you're out in the field, don't come back home.

19-20. "Those days will be very hard on families with little children. So you need to pray that this won't happen in the winter or on the Sabbath.

21-22. "There will come a time when those who believe in Me will be greatly persecuted. But God will cut the time short.

23-24. "Near the end, some will tell you that they saw Me here or there. Don't believe them. Some will say that they have taken My place, and Satan will help them work miracles to prove it. These miracles will look so real that they'll almost deceive those who love Me. So don't believe everything you see.

25-27. "I'm telling you all this ahead of time so that you'll know what to expect. If people tell you that they saw Me in the desert or talked with Me in some secret meeting, don't believe it. I will not come back secretly. My coming will be as bright as lightning, and everybody will see Me.

28-29. "When you see vultures circling in the sky, you know that's a sign that something dead is nearby. Signs showing that My coming is near will be that plain. Some signs will happen only near the end. The sun will get dark, the moon won't shine, and falling stars will fill the sky. All nature will seem to be out of order.

30-31. "When I return, everyone around the world will see Me coming in bright clouds of heaven. People who aren't ready will be scared. Those who love Me will be happy. Angels will

come with Me and blow their trumpets. They will bring My people together from all parts of the world.

32-35. "Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When you see it grow new leaves, you know that spring is here. In the same way you'll be able to tell from signs that My coming is near. Many of those living now will see Jerusalem destroyed. And those living near the end will see My coming. What I've told you is more sure than the heavens and earth that you see.

36-38. "No one knows the exact day of My coming, not even the angels, only My Father. But just as things were in the days of Noah, that's how they'll be at the end. Before the flood all that people thought about was eating, drinking, falling in love, and marrying as many times as they wanted. They never thought about God until Noah went into the ark, and then the flood came.

39. "They didn't believe that what Noah had said would happen. And when the rains came, it was too late. That's how it will be in the end. Few will believe what My people will tell them.

40-41. "Those who believe the prophecies and those who don't will live side by side. One will be ready for My coming, and the other will not. Two women will be busy working; one will be ready for My coming, and the other will not.

42-44. "Those who love Me will have to keep watching, because no one knows the exact time when I'll come back. If a man knew when a thief would break into his house, he would stay awake and watch for him. That's what My people need to do, because when they least expect it, that's when I'll come.

45-47. "The way to be ready is to be like a good servant. He takes care of

his master's things and helps his fellow servants while his master is away. The master will be very happy when he returns, because his servant did a good job in looking after things. He'll promote that servant and trust him with everything he has.

48-49. "People who don't put the things of God first are like a servant who thinks that his master will be gone a long time. He doesn't take care of his master's things and doesn't help his fellow servants. He thinks only about himself.

50-51. "But when he's not expecting it, suddenly his master will return and surprise him. He will dismiss that servant to join others like him. That servant will not only lose his job, but will suffer even more than you can imagine."

The Parable About Bridesmaids

25 Then Jesus told His disciples three stories. He said, "During the time of the end, My people will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps to wait for the bridegroom to come and pick up his bride. Five of these bridesmaids were wise, and five were foolish. The foolish didn't take extra oil with them, but the wise did.

5-7. "The bridegroom was delayed. So while the bridesmaids waited, they all fell asleep. About midnight the bridegroom's coming was announced, and everyone wanted to go out to meet him. All the bridesmaids jumped up, lit their lamps, and went to welcome the bridegroom.

8-9. "But the lamps of the foolish bridesmaids started going out. So they said to the others, 'Please give us your extra oil, because our lamps are almost out.' The wise bridesmaids said, 'We would love to help you, but if we give you our extra oil there won't

be enough for us. Hurry, go buy some oil for yourselves before it's too late.'

10. "While the foolish bridesmaids were away buying oil, the bridegroom came. The wise were so happy to see him. Then they all went inside, and the doors were closed.

11-12. "Soon the foolish came back and tried to get in, but the doors were locked. They knocked and said, 'Please open the doors and let us in!' The bridegroom said, 'I don't know you. All those who welcomed me are here, and my father has locked the doors.'

13. "That's how it will be at the end of the world. No one knows exactly when I will come back."

The Parable About Managers

14-15. Jesus said, "At the time of the end, it will be like a business owner who went on a long trip. Before he left, he met with his managers and told them what he wanted them to do. He gave one \$5,000, another \$2,000, and another \$1,000, depending on their ability.

16-18. "The manager with \$5,000 invested it in the business, and soon had \$10,000. The one with \$2,000 did the same thing, and soon had \$4,000. But the one who had \$1,000 did nothing with it. He just took it home and buried it.

19. "After some time the business owner came back and called his managers together to see how things had gone while he was away.

20-21. "The first manager said, 'Sir, you gave me \$5,000, and I doubled it for you.' The owner said, 'You did well. Now I can trust you with even more.'

22-23. "The next one said, 'Sir, you gave me \$2,000, and I too doubled it.' The owner said, 'You did well. Now I can trust you with even more.'

24-27. "Then the last one said, 'Sir,

you gave me \$1,000. I knew that if I lost it, you wouldn't be happy. So I kept it safe at home. Here it is. Let me give it back to you.' The owner said, 'You didn't do what I expected you to do. The least you could have done was to give it to those who know how to invest it. Then it would have brought in something extra for me.

28-30. "'I really can't trust you, so I'll give that money to those who know how to use it. Anyone who uses what I have given him will receive more. Anyone who doesn't will lose what he has. So I'm letting you go, no matter how painful it is.'"

The Parable About Believers

31-33. Jesus said, "When I return, I'll come as a king, with angels and with the glory of My Father. The angels will gather all the people in the world. Then I'll separate those who love Me from those who don't, just as a shepherd separates his sheep from the goats. He puts the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

34-36. "I'll say to those on My right, 'Come, you who are My sheep. Let's go home. When people were thirsty, you gave them something to drink. When they were hungry, you fed them. When they had no place to stay, you took them in. When they had nothing to wear, you gave them clothes. When they were sick, you cared for them. When they were in prison, you visited them. What you did for them you did for Me.'

37-40. "They'll say to Me, 'Lord, we didn't know that when we did all this, we were actually helping You.' I'll say to them, 'Whatever you did to help someone in need was the same as if you had helped Me.'

41-43. "Then I'll turn to those on My left and say, 'I can't take you home

with Me, because you're no different than you were before. When I was hungry, you didn't feed Me. When I was thirsty, you didn't give Me a drink. When I didn't have a place to stay, you didn't take Me in. When I needed clothes, you didn't care. When I was in prison, you forgot all about Me.'

44-46. "They'll say, 'Lord, we didn't know that You needed these things. If we had, we would have helped You.' Then I'll have to say to them, 'Because you didn't do anything to help others, you didn't really do anything for Me. I can't take you home with Me, because at My house everybody cares about everybody else.'"

The Plan to Kill Jesus

26 After Jesus finished talking to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, He said, "The day after tomorrow the Passover begins. I will be arrested and killed."

3-5. Meanwhile the high priest had called together the priests and elders to talk about Jesus. He asked them to help him plan how to get rid of Him. They said, "Whatever we do, let's not do it during the Passover. This is our most important religious day of the year. The people might start a riot."

6-7. In Bethany Jesus and His disciples were invited to Simon's house for dinner. Jesus had healed him of a bad skin disease. While everyone was eating, Mary came in with a jar of very expensive perfume. Jesus had forgiven and healed her. In gratitude she poured perfume on His head and feet.

8-9. Judas whispered to the disciples, "What a waste of money! We could have sold this expensive perfume and used the money to help the poor."

10-11. Jesus overheard him and said, "Why are you embarrassing her? She

has done a beautiful thing for Me. You will always have a chance to help the poor. But I will be with you only a few more days.

12-13. "Mary knows that something bad will happen to Me. So she is honoring Me while I'm still alive. What she's done will be part of the gospel wherever it is preached."

14-16. Judas was very upset with Jesus. So he left, went to the priests, and asked, "How much will you give me if I tell you where to find Jesus, so you can arrest Him without people knowing?" They said, "We'll give you thirty pieces of silver." Judas agreed. From that time on he secretly stayed in touch with the priests to let them know where Jesus was.

The Lord's Supper

17. Now that year the Passover started on Thursday evening and lasted all day Friday. The Festival of Bread started the next day on Sabbath. This made the Sabbath doubly special that week. Two of Jesus' disciples came and asked Him, "Where shall we eat our Passover meal?"

18-19. Jesus answered, "Go into the city and follow a man carrying a large water jar on his head. Ask him if we could use one of his rooms to eat the Passover meal together." That's what the two disciples did. Then they prepared the meal in the upstairs room.

20-21. A little before sunset Jesus and His disciples went there. Soon they were seated and ready to eat. As they ate, Jesus said, "Only a few more hours, and one of you will betray Me to the priests."

22-25. The disciples couldn't believe it! Each one asked, "Lord, is it I?" Jesus replied, "The one who dips his bread in the common bowl with Me is the one. What the prophets have said

about Me will happen. But it would have been better for that person if he had not been born." Judas asked Jesus, "Are you talking about me?" He answered, "Yes, I am."

26. Then Jesus blessed the Passover meal. He took the bread, broke it, and gave a piece to each disciple. "Eat this bread with Me because it represents My body."

27-30. Next He took the cup of grape juice, gave thanks, and said, "All of you, drink this juice with Me. It represents My blood, which I will shed for you and for the sins of the whole world. I will not drink grape juice again until we eat together in My kingdom." Then they sang a hymn and left for the Mount of Olives.

31-32. As they walked, Jesus said, "When they arrest Me a few hours from now, all of you will run. The prophet Zechariah predicted this when he said, 'They will catch the shepherd, and the sheep will run.' But three days after they kill Me, I'll come back to life. And I'll meet you by the lake in Galilee."

33-35. Peter replied, "Lord, the other men might run, but not me!" Jesus said, "In the morning before the rooster crows, you will deny knowing Me three times." Peter answered, "Never! I would die before I'd deny You." And all the disciples said the same thing.

Jesus Prays for Help

36-38. When they reached the garden called Gethsemane, Jesus told His disciples, "Stay here while I go over there to pray." He took Peter, James, and John with Him. After they had walked a little way, Jesus became very sad and very weak. He said, "I feel as if I'm dying. Stay here and pray for Me."

39. Then He walked a little way and fell to the ground. He prayed, "Father, what is happening? Please don't leave

Me! But whatever You want Me to go through, I'm willing to do it."

40-41. Jesus struggled to His feet and staggered back to the three disciples, but they were fast asleep. He nudged them awake and said, "Couldn't you stay awake for a little while and pray for Me? At least pray for yourselves. So that you won't give in to the temptations that will come to you tonight. I know your heart is willing, but your body is tired."

42-43. Then Jesus felt another wave of sadness. He staggered back to where He was before and fell on His knees. "Father, I don't want to die, but if You want Me to, I'm willing." Again Jesus struggled to His feet and returned to the three disciples. But they had fallen asleep again.

44-46. So He went back to the place of prayer a third time. He fell to the ground and prayed the same prayer. Then He went back to the three disciples. "Are you still sleeping?" He asked. "Wake up. Here comes My betrayer with the Temple guards."

Jesus Is Arrested

47-48. Then Judas came with the priests, religious leaders, Temple guards, and a mob carrying swords and clubs. Judas had told them that Jesus would be in the garden. But because it was very dark, he would have to show them which one He was by kissing Him on both cheeks.

49-50. So Judas called out, "Greetings, Jesus!" Then he went up and kissed Him. Jesus asked, "Friend, why have you come to kiss Me?" Judas stepped back, and the guards grabbed Jesus and held Him.

51-54. When Peter saw this, he pulled out his sword and swung it at the closest man, slicing off his ear. Jesus said, "Peter, put your sword away. Those who

fight with the sword get killed by the sword. Don't you know that I could call thousands of angels to come and fight for Me? But how then would the prophecies that must happen be fulfilled?"

55-56. Jesus gently freed Himself from the hold of the guards, touched the man's head, and healed his ear. He asked the priests, "Why have you come here in the dark to arrest Me? All week I've been teaching in the Temple, and you didn't touch Me. But this is what the prophecies said would happen." Then the guards grabbed Him, and all the disciples ran away.

Jesus Taken to Court

57. Jesus was taken to Caiaphas, the high priest, who was also the judge. He called some other priests to help him try Jesus. According to the law, a criminal trial was not supposed to be held at night.

58. Peter had followed the guards at a safe distance as far as the courtyard. Then he, together with others, waited to see what would happen.

59-61. The priests tried to find people to witness against Jesus so that they could legally put Him to death. But the witnesses they found didn't say what the priests wanted to hear. Finally two witnesses lied about Jesus. One man said, "I heard Jesus say that He would destroy the Temple and build it again in three days." The other witness agreed.

62-63. The high priest stood up and demanded, "What do You have to say about that? Answer me!" Jesus said nothing. Then the high priest angrily said, "I command You to tell us the truth. Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?"

64. Jesus answered, "What you have said is correct. One day you will see Me coming in the clouds of heaven sitting next to God, having all power and authority."

65-66. When the high priest heard that, he tore his robe in anger and shouted, "This is outrageous! It's an insult to God! We don't need more witnesses. He has condemned Himself by claiming to have the power of God. What should we do with this man?" The priests all answered, "Let Him die for what He said!"

67-68. When they heard the priests condemn Him, some men went up and spit in His face. Others slapped or pushed Him. Some shouted in His face, "If You're the Messiah, tell us who hit You. Come on, tell us!"

Peter Denies Knowing Jesus

69-70. While all this was going on, Peter was still in the courtyard warming himself by the fire. A girl came up to him and asked, "Aren't you a disciple of Jesus?" Peter denied it, saying, "I don't know what you're talking about."

71-72. Just as he turned to walk away, another girl said to those by the fire, "I know that this man is a follower of Jesus!" Peter again denied knowing Jesus, this time with an oath.

73-74. Later some people standing around said to him, "You must be a disciple of Jesus, because you talk the way He talks." Then Peter began to curse and swear to show that he was not a disciple. He said, "I tell you, I don't know Him!" Just then a rooster crowed.

75. As soon as Peter heard it, he remembered what Jesus had said, "Before the rooster crows you will deny Me three times." Peter rushed out of the gate and ran back to the garden, where he cried for a long time.

Jesus Is Taken to the Governor

27 Just at sunrise the high priest called all the priests for an official meeting of the court. He explained what had hap-

pened, and the majority voted that Jesus should die. They knew they had to take Him to Pilate, the Roman governor, for sentencing.

3-5. When Judas saw what was happening, he rushed up to the chief priests and said, "I've betrayed an innocent man! I just wanted Him to show His power." But the priests would not listen and told Judas to get out. Then Judas threw down the money they had given him, and went out and hanged himself.

6-10. The priests said, "What should we do with this money? It has paid for a man's death." They decided to use it to buy some property for burying poor people. That's why it's called Blood Cemetery. This happened just as the prophet Jeremiah predicted when he said, "They will pay thirty pieces of silver for the Son of God, the price of a slave. Then they will buy a cemetery with it."

11. It was still early in the morning when the priests and leaders brought Jesus to the Roman governor. Pilate asked Jesus, "Are You the King of the Jews, as they say You are?" Jesus replied, "What you have spoken is the truth."

12-14. Then the priests accused Him of being a traitor to Rome and cursing God. But Jesus answered nothing. The governor looked at Jesus and said, "Do You hear what they're saying?" Still, Jesus was quiet. Pilate was surprised at how calm He remained.

15-18. It was the custom at the Passover to release a Jewish prisoner. So Pilate brought out Barabbas, the worst Jewish prisoner he had. The governor asked the priests which one of the prisoners they wanted him to set free, Jesus or Barabbas. Pilate knew they wanted to get rid of Jesus, but he was hoping they would change their minds.

19. As the governor took his seat as

judge, someone handed him a note from his wife that read, "Don't condemn that man. He's innocent! I had a dream about Him that troubled me greatly."

20-21. By this time the priests had already persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas. So when Pilate asked again which prisoner he should set free, the people shouted, "Barabbas! Barabbas!"

22-23. Pilate said, "What should I do with Jesus?" They shouted, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate asked, "Why? He hasn't done anything to deserve death." The people shouted louder, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

24-25. Pilate could see that the people were serious. This was turning into a riot. So he asked for a basin of water, washed his hands in front of everyone, and said, "I'm innocent of this man's blood. Do with Him what you want. It's your decision." The crowd replied, "If it's our decision, we want Him crucified!"

26-27. So the governor freed Barabbas and ordered Jesus whipped. Then he turned Him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified. They took Jesus to the courtyard and called out the other guards to have some fun.

28-29. They stripped Jesus and put an old purple robe on Him. Then they twisted a branch of thorns into a crown, and shoved it down on His head. They put a stick in His hand, like a king's scepter. Laughing, they knelt in front of Him, saying, "Long live the King of the Jews!"

30-31. They spit in His face. Then they used sticks and beat Him on the head. After they had made fun of Him, they took off His robe and tied Him to a post. They whipped Him so hard that it tore His back open. Then they untied Him, put His own robe back on, and made Him carry the cross.

Jesus Crucified

32. By now Jesus was too weak to carry the cross. Simon, a man in the crowd, expressed sympathy for Jesus, so they made him carry the cross.

33-34. Finally, they got to the top of a little hill just outside Jerusalem. It was called Golgotha, or The Place of the Skull. The soldiers offered Jesus a drink with painkilling drugs in it, but after Jesus tasted it, He spit it out.

35-37. The soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross. Then they lifted the cross up and dropped it in place. After that, they gambled for His robe, as David had predicted: "They will divide His garments and gamble for His robe." Then they waited for Jesus to die. Above His head they had put a sign: "This is Jesus, King of the Jews."

38-39. Two outlaws were crucified with Jesus, one on His left and one on His right. And as was the custom, people walked past the crosses to show their contempt. They said a lot of bad things about Jesus, and shook their heads, saying,

40. "Aren't You the one who said that You could destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days? If You're so powerful, why don't You save Yourself? If You're really the Son of God, come down from that cross!"

41-43. The priests also made fun of Jesus. They pointed their fingers at Him and laughingly said, "He saved others, but He cannot save Himself! If He is the Messiah, the King of Israel, let Him work a miracle and come down from the cross. Then we will believe in Him! He said He was God's Son. If God had really sent Him, He would come to His rescue!"

44. Even the two men who were crucified with Jesus made fun of Him.

45. At noon a thick darkness covered

the whole area, and it lasted until three o'clock in the afternoon.

46. Suddenly, Jesus cried out, "Father, have You left Me?"

47-49. The people thought He was asking God to send Elijah from heaven to help Him. Someone put a sponge on the end of a long stick. They dipped it in the liquid painkiller and offered it to Jesus. Others said, "Leave Him alone! Let's see if God will send Elijah to help Him."

50. Just then Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "It is finished!" Then He bowed His head and died.

51-53. At that very moment the Temple curtain covering the Most Holy Place was ripped in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, and rocks split in two. The graves of some of God's people were opened, and later when Jesus rose from the grave, they too were raised from the dead. Then they went into Jerusalem and appeared to many.

54. When the soldiers saw the darkness and felt the earthquake, they became scared. The captain cried out, "This man must have been the Son of God!"

55-56. Many women who were followers of Jesus had been watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, the woman Jesus had healed; Mary, the mother of young James and Joseph; and Salome, the mother of the two Zebedee brothers, James and John.

Jesus Is Buried

57. It was getting late in the afternoon, and soon the Sabbath would begin. Joseph, a Jewish leader who believed that Jesus was God's Son, came to help bury Him.

58-59. Joseph went to the governor and asked for permission to take

Jesus' body down from the cross and bury it. Pilate was surprised that Jesus was already dead, and gave his permission. So Joseph and some others took Jesus' body down, wrapped it in a clean sheet, and put it in Joseph's own grave in a nearby cave.

60-61. Then they rolled a huge stone in front of the entrance and went home to get ready for Sabbath. But Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of young James and Joseph, stayed at the tomb a little longer.

62-64. The next day, which was the Sabbath, the priests went to see the governor and said, "Sir, this man Jesus said that three days after He died, He would come back to life. That would be tomorrow. Would you station some troops at His grave? His disciples might steal His body and claim that He rose from the dead. That would make matters worse than when He was alive."

65-66. So Pilate ordered some soldiers to go to the grave with the priests to seal the tomb. They poured hot wax on the edge of the huge stone where it touched the cave, and stamped it with the Roman seal. Now it was against the law for anyone to roll away the stone.

Jesus' Resurrection

28 After the Sabbath, as it began to dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of young James and Joseph, went to the tomb. They hoped that someone would be there to help them roll away the stone, as they wanted to finish taking care of the body of Jesus.

2-3. As they neared the tomb, suddenly a severe earthquake shook the

ground. The angel Gabriel had come down from heaven, rolled away the stone, and now sat on it. His face was as bright as lightning, and his robe as white as new-fallen snow. When the soldiers had seen Jesus come out of the tomb, they all had fainted because they were so afraid.

4-7. Before the women got there, Gabriel took on the appearance of a man. He said to the women, "Don't be afraid. I know you have come to take care of the body of Jesus. But He's not here. He is risen! Come and see for yourselves. The cave is empty. Go quickly and tell the disciples that Jesus has risen from the dead. He will go ahead of them to Galilee."

8-10. The women were scared but happy. They ran to tell the disciples everything they had seen and what Gabriel had said. On the way Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" The women couldn't believe it. They fell on their knees and worshiped Him. Jesus said, "Don't be afraid. Go and tell My disciples that I'm alive and that I'll meet them by the Sea of Galilee."

11-12. Meanwhile some of the Roman guards ran to the priests to tell them what had happened. The priests were shocked. They offered the guards a large sum of money and told them not to tell what had really happened.

13-14. They said, "Don't tell anyone that Jesus rose from the dead. Tell them that you fell asleep, and when you woke up, the body was gone. Jesus' disciples must have stolen it. If Pilate gets angry because you fell asleep, don't be afraid. We'll talk to him and keep you out of trouble."

15. So that's what happened. The guards took the money and lied. And the Jewish people believed what they said.

16-17. Meanwhile, the disciples left

Jerusalem and went to a mountain by the Sea of Galilee to meet Jesus. When they saw Him, they fell on their knees and worshiped Him. But when other people saw Jesus, they doubted.

18. Jesus spent a number of days with His disciples. When it was time for Him to leave to go to heaven, He said,

"My Father has given Me all power in heaven and on earth.

19-20. "Go and share the good news with everyone. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teach them everything I've taught you. I'll always be with you, right up to the end of the world!"

Mark

INTRODUCTION: *This is the second of the four Gospels. Mark was a young believer who wrote what Peter told him about Jesus. It's the shortest of the Gospels and was written for the Romans. Peter wanted them to know that Jesus was their Savior and King, and yet He was willing to be a servant. Jesus worked many miracles to help people. He made the blind see and the lame walk, and He brought a little girl back to life.*

Jesus Is Baptized

1 The good news about Jesus was predicted by prophets long ago. God spoke through them, saying, "I am sending a special messenger to tell people to change their ways, so they will be ready for the arrival of My Son."

4-6. That is what John the Baptist did. When the people confessed their sins, he baptized them. Crowds went to the Jordan River to hear him preach. Many confessed their sins and were baptized. John dressed like one of the prophets in Old Testament times. He wore a short robe made out of camel's hair and had a strip of leather around his waist for a belt.

7-8. He said, "God will soon send Someone with a message more important than mine. I'm not good enough to untie His sandals. I baptize you with water. But He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit!"

Jesus Starts His Ministry

9-11. One day Jesus went to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. As He came up out of the water, the sky opened, and the power of the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus. The light above His head was shaped like a dove. Then God spoke from

heaven and said, "You are My own Son, whom I love. I am very pleased with You!"

12-13. From there Jesus went into the wilderness to fast and pray to prepare for His ministry. He was there for forty days, alone, except for the wild animals. While He was there, Satan greatly tempted Jesus, but He refused to give in. Then God sent angels to take care of Jesus and to strengthen Him.

14-15. Soon afterward John the Baptist was put in prison. But Jesus took John's place and began to preach: "The time for God's kingdom has come. Repent and confess your sins! Believe what I tell you about God's love, and you will be changed."

16-18. One day as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Peter and his brother, Andrew, throwing their fishing nets out into the lake to catch fish. He called to them, "Come and follow Me, and I'll teach you how to fish for people!" Immediately Peter and Andrew left their nets and followed Him.

19-20. Jesus kept walking along the shore and saw James and his brother, John, sitting in their father's boat repairing their nets. Jesus called to them, "Come, follow Me!"

They left their nets and followed Him.

Jesus Heals People

21-22. Then Jesus and His four disciples went to the little town of Capernaum. On Sabbath they attended church, and Jesus started teaching in the synagogue. The people were amazed at what they heard. The priests had made everything so hard to understand. Jesus made it plain and simple with love in His voice.

23-24. This Sabbath a man controlled by a demon was there. He stood up and shouted, "Leave us alone! We know who You are. You're Jesus of Nazareth, the one God sent. You have come to punish us."

25-26. Jesus said to the demon, "Be quiet! Leave this man alone." The demon threw the man down, jerked him around several times, and then left.

27-28. Everyone was surprised. "We've never seen anything like this before. What kind of teacher is this man Jesus? Even the demons obey Him!" News of this spread all over Galilee.

29-31. After church Jesus and His four disciples went to Peter's house for dinner. When they got there, they found Peter's mother-in-law sick in bed with a high fever. Jesus went to see her, took her hand, and told her to sit up. Just like that, the fever left her, and she prepared dinner for them.

32-34. After the Sabbath, people lined up at the door to be healed. It looked as though the whole town had come to see Jesus. He healed the people of all kinds of diseases. Even those controlled by the devil were healed. Not a sick person was left in the town.

35-38. Before sunrise the next morning, Jesus went up into the hills to talk to His Father. Peter and the other disciples went looking for Jesus. When they found Him, they said,

"People are already at the house waiting for You." Jesus replied, "We must go to other villages to take the good news to them, too. That's what I'm here for."

39-40. Near one little town a man who had a terrible skin disease called leprosy knelt in front of Jesus and pleaded, "If You will, I know You can heal me."

41-42. Jesus' heart was touched when He saw the condition the man was in. He reached out and touched him and said, "Of course I want to heal you." Instantly the man was healed.

43-44. Before the man left, Jesus said to him, "Go to the priest. Let him see you and pronounce you cured. Then bring an offering to the Temple and do what the priest tells you to do. This will let everyone know that you are healed."

45. But the man told everyone he met that Jesus had healed him. It upset the priests that the man had not come to them first. This made it hard for Jesus, so He decided to work in more rural areas. But even there people found Him.

Jesus Teaches the People

2 Several days later Jesus came back to Capernaum. Before long, people knew that He was there. Soon the house where He was staying was full of visitors. People were even standing outside looking in.

3-4. Four men carried their paralyzed friend on a stretcher, hoping Jesus would heal him. But because of the crowd, they couldn't get into the house. So they climbed up on the flat roof, took off some tiles, and lowered their friend down right in front of Jesus.

5-7. Jesus admired their love for their friend and their faith in Him. So He

said, "Son, your sins are forgiven." The priests there overheard this. They thought, "Who does He think He is? Only God can forgive sin. Claiming He can forgive sins is the worst sin of all."

8-11. Jesus knew what they were thinking and said, "Why do you accuse Me of sin? Let Me ask you a question: Which takes more power, to forgive sin or to heal someone who is totally paralyzed?" He then said to the man, "Pick up your stretcher and go home."

12. Immediately the man got up, picked up his stretcher, and praised God. Then he walked through the crowd and went home. The people were stunned. Never had they seen anything like this before!

Jesus Answers Questions

13-14. A crowd followed Jesus as He left the house and went down to the lake. On the way He passed a tax collector's booth and saw a man named Matthew. Jesus said, "Come, follow Me." Matthew got up, let his assistant take over, and followed Jesus.

15-16. Later Matthew invited Jesus and His disciples to his house for dinner. He had also invited tax gatherers and other outcasts. When some priests saw Jesus eating with those people, they said to His disciples, "How can Jesus eat with sinners, especially with tax collectors who help the Romans?"

17. Jesus heard this and said, "People who are healthy don't need a doctor, only people who are sick. I came not to help people who feel they don't need Me, but to help those who know they need Me."

18. Now, John the Baptist's disciples fasted every week, just as some of the priests did. They came to Jesus and asked, "Why don't Your disciples fast every week as we do?"

19-20. Jesus responded, "Do guests at a wedding fast when they are with the bridegroom? That wouldn't be the thing to do. After the bridegroom has left, there will be plenty of time to fast."

21-22. "Do people use a new piece of cloth to patch a hole in old rotten clothes? Of course not. The rotten clothes will tear again, and the hole will be bigger than before. Would you pour fresh grape juice into an old container that's ready to break? That wouldn't be a good idea. People put new grape juice into new containers."

23-24. One day after church Jesus and His disciples walked through a wheat field. They broke off a few heads of wheat and ate the little kernels because they were hungry. Some priests saw it and said, "Your disciples shouldn't be doing this on the Sabbath! That's harvesting. It is against God's law."

25-26. Jesus asked, "Haven't you read about what David did when he was hungry? He went to the sanctuary and asked the high priest for something to eat. He gave him the only thing he had, the holy bread that only the priests are supposed to eat. But because David and his men were so hungry, what the high priest did was not wrong."

27-28. "God made the Sabbath to help people. People were not made to be servants of the Sabbath. I am the Lord of the Sabbath. I know what's right and what isn't."

Jesus Heals More People

3 At another time when Jesus and His disciples went to church, a man with a paralyzed hand was there. Some of the priests watched to see whether or not Jesus would heal him. They wanted to accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath.

3-5. Jesus said to the man, "Stand up." Then He asked the people, "Is it better to heal someone on the Sabbath or to let him suffer?" No one answered. Jesus felt sad. No one seemed to know what was right or wrong. So Jesus said to the man, "Let Me see your hand." As he held it up, suddenly it was healed!

6. The priests were really upset. After church they went to talk to the Jewish authorities about how to get rid of Jesus.

7-8. Jesus and His disciples left and went down to the lake. Many people followed them. They came from everywhere wanting to see Jesus. Some came from Jerusalem, some from across the Jordan River, and others from as far away as the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

9. When Jesus saw all these people, He told the disciples to get one of the fishing boats ready in case He needed it.

10-12. The people wanted to be healed so badly that they almost pushed Him into the water. Some were controlled by demons. People would fall to the ground in front of Jesus and shout, "You are the Son of God!" He told the demons to stop screaming and leave the people alone, and they obeyed.

13-15. Later that day Jesus climbed a nearby hill to be alone with His disciples and to set them apart for the ministry. He also gave them power to heal the sick and cast out demons.

16-19. The names of the disciples were Peter and his brother, Andrew; James and his brother, John; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; young James; Thaddaeus; Simon; and Judas. After He ordained them for the ministry, they went to Peter's house to eat.

Jesus Teaches the People

20. No sooner did they arrive than a

crowd began to gather. Some pushed their way into the house so that neither Jesus nor His disciples could eat.

21. Jesus' family in Nazareth had heard about Him healing people on the Sabbath and were afraid of what might happen to Him. So they decided to bring Him home.

22-24. Priests who were in the crowd were telling people that it was Satan who was working through Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Why would Satan cast out his own demons? His kingdom wouldn't last.

25-26. "It's the same way in a family. If people keep fighting each other, it destroys the family. So if Satan turns against his own helpers, his kingdom can't survive.

27. "If a robber wants to steal from a strong man's house, he must first bind the man. It's the same with Satan. No one can take people away from him unless someone is stronger than he is.

28-29. "God is ready to forgive all kinds of sins, but there is one sin that He cannot forgive. If someone says that Satan is working through Me and that the power of the Holy Spirit is the power of the devil, then God has no way of helping that man."

30. Jesus had to talk that way in front of everyone to defend Himself against the false accusations that the priests were making.

31-32. By this time Jesus' mother and His stepbrothers had arrived. But they couldn't get into the house because of the crowd. Finally someone told Jesus that His family was outside and wanted to see Him.

33-35. Jesus asked, "Who makes up My family?" Then He said to the people, "You are My family! Anyone who obeys My Father is My brother and sister." Then He went outside to see His mother and brothers.

Parables

4 Jesus returned to the lake, and the crowd was right behind Him. So many people gathered that He had to sit in a boat just offshore to preach. He taught the people by using parables. "Do you see the sower up there on the hill?"

4-7. "When a man plants seeds, some of them fall on the road, and the birds eat them. Some seeds fall on stony ground, where there is only a little soil. They grow fast because their roots can't go down very deep. But after a few hot days they die. Other seeds fall among little thorny weeds that grow faster and crowd out the good plants.

8-9. "But most of the seed falls on good ground and grows up to produce a big harvest—maybe thirty, sixty, or even 100 times more than was sown. If you have ears to hear, listen to what I just said."

10-11. When Jesus was alone with the disciples, they asked Him what this parable meant. He answered, "When I'm talking to you, I can speak more plainly. But when I talk to the people I have to use parables.

12. "This will separate those who want to know more from those who do not. The Holy Spirit will help those who want to know the meaning of My stories. But those who do not are like people without eyes and ears. They're afraid to know more because they would have to change their ways.

13-15. "If you did not catch the meaning of this parable, how will you understand others? So let Me help you. The sower represents a man sowing the seeds of the gospel. The soil on the road represents people who hear the good news, but whose hearts are hardened by pleasures and sin. Satan

is right there to take away any interest they might have had.

16-17. "The stony ground represents people who accept the good news but do not let it sink deep into their hearts. When troubles come, they give up.

18-19. "The ground with thorns represents those who accept the gospel. But soon a lot of other things in life choke out what was there. And they lose out on what they had.

20. "Then there is the good soil. It represents those who not only hear and accept the gospel, but love it. They produce all kinds of spiritual crops, some more and some less, but all good.

21. "Let Me ask you a question. Do people buy a lamp and cover it up? Or do they buy a lamp and let it shine so that people in the house can see better?

22-23. "The good news about God's love is not something to hide, but something to be shared. Those who hear this parable should try to understand what I am saying.

24. "You need to be careful what you listen to, because Satan loves to mix truth with error. The more you share truth, the more God will give you to share.

25. "Those who love the truth and share it will always get more, but those who do not share it will lose what they have.

26-27. "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who has planted good seed. He works hard and has confidence that the seed will spring up and grow, even if he doesn't know how.

28-29. "He knows that the soil will produce a harvest. First, the seed sprouts; then there's the little stalk; then the head; and finally the full head of grain. Then he calls in workers to help him bring in the harvest.

30-32. "What else can I compare the kingdom of heaven to? It's like a tiny mustard seed, which few people pay much attention to. But it grows to be one of the largest of all garden plants. It even has branches on which the birds build their nests."

33-34. In teaching the people, Jesus nearly always used stories or parables to help them understand what He was trying to say. Then when He was alone with His disciples, He would explain what the stories meant.

Jesus and the Storm

35-36. After Jesus finished teaching and healing the people, He said to His disciples, "Let's go across the lake." They sent the people home and pushed off to sail across the lake.

37-38. When they were halfway across, all at once a terrible storm came up. Huge waves washed over and into the boat. Through all of this, Jesus was sleeping. The disciples were scared, because the storm was getting worse. They called out, "Lord, don't You care what happens to us?"

39-40. Jesus knew that Satan had brought on the storm. He stood up and commanded the wind and waves, "Be quiet!" Immediately the wind stopped, and the waves were calm. Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Why were you so scared? Don't you have faith?"

41. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed and whispered to each other, "What kind of power does He have, that even the wind and waves obey Him?"

A Man Controlled by Demons

5 When Jesus and His disciples reached the other side of the lake, a madman came running down the hill from a cemetery.

3-5. He had been living in a cave be-

cause no one could keep him chained. No one could even calm him down. Day and night he would scream and cut himself with sharp stones until he was covered with blood. People were afraid to go near.

6-8. As he came charging down the hill at Jesus, the disciples turned and ran. But Jesus didn't. The man fell on his knees before Him and shouted, "You're Jesus, the Son of God. Please don't torture me!" He said this because he knew that Jesus was ready to ask the demon to leave him.

9-10. Jesus asked the demon, "What is your name?" He answered, "My name is Legion, because we are many. When you ask us to come out of this man, please don't send us out of the area."

11-13. Not far away was a great herd of pigs. The demon said, "Let us go into those pigs." Jesus said, "Go!" Then the demons left the man. They rushed into the pigs, which ran over the cliff, and about 2,000 pigs drowned in the water below.

14-15. Then the herdsmen ran to the owners. On the way, they told everyone what had happened, so the people went to see for themselves. It was true. The wild man sat next to Jesus, quietly talking with Him.

16-18. At first they were amazed. Then they and the pig farmers ordered Jesus to leave because they did not want to lose more pigs. Jesus was sad. He had hoped they would see that people are more important than pigs. He and His disciples went back to their boat. The man begged to go with them.

19-20. But Jesus said, "I want you to go home and tell your family and friends what the Lord has done for you." So he returned to his village and told people about Jesus and the wonderful thing He had done for him. The people were amazed.

Jesus Brings a Little Girl Back to Life

21. Jesus and His disciples crossed the lake again. A large crowd met Him on the shore.

22-24. Jairus, one of the church leaders, came to Jesus. He knelt before Him and said, "My little girl is dying! Please come and heal her." Jesus agreed, and started following the man.

25-26. A woman who had been sick for twelve years was in the crowd. She had been to many doctors and had used up all her money, but she was getting worse.

27-29. She thought, "If only I can get close enough to touch Jesus' robe, I know I'll be healed." So she pushed her way through the crowd and touched Jesus' robe. Immediately she was healed.

30-31. Jesus stopped, looked around, and asked, "Who touched Me?" The disciples answered, "Lord, with all these people pushing and shoving, how can You ask such a question?"

32-34. But Jesus kept looking. He saw the woman hiding in the crowd. She was so afraid that she was shaking. She knelt down and told Jesus what had happened. Jesus said, "Don't be afraid. Go home and tell others what the Lord has done for you."

35-36. While He was talking to her, some men pushed through the crowd. They told Jairus that his little girl had died. He need not bother Jesus anymore. Jesus overheard it and said to the father, "Don't worry. Have faith in what I can do for your little girl, just as this woman did."

37. Then Jesus asked His disciples and the people to wait for Him, while He took Peter, James, and John with Him to the girl's house.

38-40. When they got there, the house was full of people, and many more

were outside. They were all crying loudly. Jesus said, "Why are all of you crying? The little girl isn't dead, she's sleeping." They laughed at Jesus. He told them to go and wait outside. Then the parents took Jesus and the disciples to the room where the young girl was.

41-42. Jesus took her by the hand and said, "Little girl, stand up!" She opened her eyes, got out of bed, and ran into her parents' arms. She was twelve years old. Her parents and the disciples were amazed.

43. Then Jesus said, "Do not tell anyone about this. It will upset the priests even more and make it hard for Me. She's hungry. Give her something to eat."

Jesus Goes to Nazareth

6 Jesus and His disciples left Jairus' home for His hometown of Nazareth.

2. Sabbath morning He went to the synagogue to teach. The people were inspired by what they heard. They said, "Where did He learn all this? And where did He get all this power to heal the sick?"

3. When Jesus talked to them about how He fulfilled the Bible prophecies, the people asked, "Isn't this the son of Joseph, the carpenter, and Mary, his wife? Aren't James, Joseph, Jude, and Simon His stepbrothers? We know His stepsisters, too. Who does He think He is?" They became very angry.

4. Jesus heard all this. He simply said, "A prophet is respected by many people, except by those in his own hometown who knew him when he was growing up."

5-6. He did not work miracles there, except to heal a few people who believed in Him. Jesus was really surprised by the people's lack of faith. So

He left Nazareth and went to other villages nearby.

7-9. He called His disciples together and sent them out in pairs to preach and heal. He told them not to take food or money along, not even a shepherd's rod. They should wear sandals, but not take extra clothes.

10. He said, "If someone invites you to stay with them, do so until you finish your work."

11. "If you go to a certain place and the people don't want to listen to you, go somewhere else. What they do will be held against them."

12-13. So the disciples went out to preach. They told the people about Jesus and urged them to repent and change their ways. They prayed for people and asked God to heal the sick. And He did. They even had power to cast out demons.

John the Baptist

14. When King Herod heard everything that Jesus was doing, he said, "He must be John the Baptist risen from the dead. That's why He can work all these miracles."

15. Others said, "He's Elijah come down from heaven." Still others said, "He must be Moses coming back to help us, or maybe one of the other prophets."

16-18. The king insisted, "I'm telling you, He's John the Baptist risen from the dead!" King Herod had put John in prison for saying that the king's marriage was not lawful. King Herod had taken his brother's wife and married her.

19-20. The queen was also upset over this and urged the king to execute John. But the king had hesitated, because he liked John and believed that he was a man of God.

21-22. At the king's birthday party

with many important people present, the queen's daughter was asked to dance for the guests. They liked her performance. The king was so pleased that he said to her, "Ask for anything, and I'll give it to you."

23-24. He even took an oath that he would keep his word. She went to her mother, the queen, and said, "What should I ask for?" Her mother replied, "Ask the king to have John executed."

25-26. The young woman went back to the king and said, "Bring me John the Baptist's head on a platter." The king was shocked and sorry. But he had made a promise in front of his guests to give her anything she asked for, so he felt he had to do it.

27-28. He called for the man in charge of the prison and told him to execute John and bring his head to the palace. So the guard executed John. He brought his head in on a platter and gave it to the princess, who took it to her mother.

29. The next morning when John's disciples heard about it, they went to the prison and asked for his body. Then they buried it.

Jesus Feeds 5,000

30. After Jesus' disciples returned from their preaching and healing mission, they told Him all that they had done and what they had taught.

31-32. Jesus said, "Let's go where we can be alone and get some rest." They had been so busy helping people that they hadn't even had time to eat. So they got into their fishing boat and went across the lake to have time for themselves.

33-34. But some people saw them leave and hurried around the lake. Before long, thousands of people had come together and arrived there ahead of them. When Jesus came

ashore and saw the crowd, He felt sorry for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He told them to sit down, and He began teaching them.

35-36. Late that afternoon the disciples said to Jesus, "This place is a long way from town, and it's getting late. Don't You think we should let these people go so they can buy food and get home before dark?"

37-38. Jesus answered, "Let's feed them." The disciples replied, "You mean we should go and buy food for all these people? We don't have that much money." Jesus asked, "How much food is there? Go and see." When they returned, they said, "Five loaves of bread and two small fish."

39-41. Jesus said, "Have the people sit down on the grass in groups of fifty to 100." And that is what they did. He took the five loaves of bread and the two small fish, looked up to heaven, and asked God to bless it. Then He gave the bread and fish to the disciples to give to the people.

42-44. When everyone had eaten all they wanted, the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of leftovers. Jesus had fed about 5,000 men, not counting women and children.

Jesus Walks on Water

45. The disciples and the crowd wanted to make Jesus king. But He sent the people home and told the disciples to sail their boat across the lake. He would follow later.

46-47. The disciples went down to the lake, but lingered before setting sail. As soon as everyone had left, Jesus walked up a hill to pray. By evening the boat was in the middle of the lake. Suddenly a strong wind came up, which brought on a big storm.

48. Jesus saw the storm in the dis-

tance and knew how hard the disciples were rowing to stay on course. So He decided to walk out on the lake to help them.

49-51. When they saw Him coming, they thought He was a ghost and cried to God for help because they were terrified. Jesus called out, "Take courage! It's your Master. Don't be afraid." Then He walked across the water to the boat and got in. As soon as He did, the storm stopped and the lake was calm. The disciples couldn't believe it!

52. In fact, they still hadn't figured out how Jesus had fed thousands of people with five loaves of bread and two small fish.

53-55. When they reached the other side of the lake, the people immediately recognized Jesus. So they ran home to get their sick relatives and friends to bring them to Jesus to be healed. The whole area was buzzing with excitement.

56. Whatever town or village He would go to in that area, people would bring their sick to be healed. They would place them in the marketplace or on the street. Some would ask Him if they could touch His robe, and when they did, they were healed.

Jesus Teaches the People

7 One day some of the leaders and teachers from Jerusalem joined the other people who had come to see Jesus. When they saw His disciples eating without having washed their hands and arms, they scolded them in front of the people.

3-4. These leaders and teachers not only washed their hands before they ate, but also washed their arms up to the elbows. And they told the people that God required this. When they came home from the market, they

would also wash each cup and plate in a certain way before they would eat.

5. When they saw that the disciples didn't do it exactly as they did, they blamed Jesus. They asked, "Why don't You teach Your disciples to do what God wants them to do?"

6-7. Jesus answered, "The prophet Isaiah was right. He said the time would come when leaders and teachers would talk a lot about God but not really love Him. They would worship God, but it wouldn't mean anything because they'd teach man-made rules.

8-9. "That's exactly what you're doing. You've put aside God's teachings for the teachings of men. You have a clever way of rejecting God's law so you can uphold your own traditions. No wonder people are confused.

10-11. "Moses spoke for God, saying that you should respect your father and mother. If they need help, take care of them. And if you turn against your parents, you don't deserve to live. But you tell the people that if they promise all their money to God, they don't have to spend it on taking care of their parents.

12-13. "Then you make things worse by telling people that they all have to do it that way. So God's commandment for people to respect and to take care of their parents doesn't mean anything anymore."

14-16. Then Jesus turned to the people and said, "Listen to Me. God never said anything about washing your hands and arms before you eat so that you wouldn't be sinning. Eating with dirty hands, if you have to, has nothing to do with God's love for you. What's important is not what goes into your mouth, but what comes out. Think about it."

17. Then someone invited Jesus to dinner. While everyone was eating,

His disciples asked Him to explain what He had said.

18-19. Jesus replied, "You mean you didn't understand? What goes into a man, like a little dirt because he didn't wash his hands, doesn't make him a bad person. It doesn't change God's love for him, because the dirt goes into the stomach and then comes out of the body.

20. "But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart. So if dirty things come out of a man's mouth, that means that there's something wrong inside.

21-23. "Bad things start in the mind, such as evil thoughts, hurting others, murder, stealing, cheating, anger, lying, wanting others' things, suspicions, cursing, pride, and foolish living. All these things start from the inside and then come out. That's the dirt that you have to watch out for."

Jesus Heals People

24. After dinner Jesus and His disciples headed for the harbor cities of Tyre and Sidon in a neighboring country. He was hoping to get a little rest, but it wasn't long before people found Him.

25-26. A Greek woman whose daughter was bothered by demons came, fell on her knees, and begged Jesus to please help her girl.

27-28. Jesus decided to show His disciples how not to treat people just because they're foreigners. So He said to the woman, "It isn't right for parents to take food away from children and give it to dogs." The woman answered, "But people do give bits of their food to family dogs."

29-30. Then Jesus showed the disciples how they should treat everyone, no matter where they're from. He said to the woman, "You are right. Because

of your faith in Me, your daughter is healed." When the woman got home, her daughter was all well!

31-32. Then Jesus and His disciples started back toward Galilee. At one place the people brought a man who could neither hear nor talk. They asked Jesus to heal him.

33-35. Jesus took the man aside, touched his ears and mouth, and said, "Open up!" Immediately the man could hear and talk.

36-37. Jesus warned the people, "Don't tell anyone what just happened. It will draw large crowds and upset the authorities." But the more He tried to explain, the more the people shouted His praise and said, "He does everything well. He gives sight to the blind and speech to those who can't talk."

Jesus Feeds 4,000

8 Another time a very large crowd came to hear Jesus. There was not much food, so Jesus said to His disciples, "My heart goes out to these people. Some have been here for parts of three days and have had little to eat. If I dismiss them, some of them could faint on the way home. Let's feed them."

4-5. The disciples replied, "We're a long way from any stores. How can we find food around here to feed all these people?" Jesus asked, "How many loaves of bread do we have?" They answered, "Seven."

6-7. Jesus told the people to sit down. Then He took the seven loaves of bread and thanked God for what they had. He broke the bread into pieces and asked the disciples to give them to the people. The disciples also gave Jesus a few small fish. He asked God to bless the fish and gave them to the disciples to pass out to the crowd.

8-9. Everyone ate until they were full. The disciples collected seven baskets of leftover food. Jesus fed more than 4,000 men that day, not counting women and children. Then He sent them all home.

10. After they left, He got into a fishing boat with the disciples and asked them to take Him across the lake.

Jesus Warns His Disciples

11. When they got there, some leaders came to ask Jesus questions. They wanted Him to prove He was the Son of God by working a miracle for them.

12. Jesus could tell that they were trying to cause trouble. He sighed, "Why are you asking Me to prove who I am? I will not do a miracle just to satisfy your curiosity."

13. Then He turned to His disciples and said, "Let's go to the other side of the lake."

14-16. The disciples had forgotten to bring food with them, and had only one loaf of bread. Jesus said, "Don't eat the yeast of the priests and leaders." The disciples asked each other, "Is He worried about the kind of bread we have, or is He trying to tell us what kind of bread to eat?"

17-18. Jesus said, "Stop and think. You know what I am talking about. I'm not talking about regular bread, but spiritual food. You have eyes to see and ears to hear, and you can think for yourselves. Have you forgotten about all the people we fed?"

19-20. "Remember the 5,000 men, plus women and children? How many basketfuls of leftovers did you pick up?" They answered, "Twelve." "Remember the 4,000 men, plus women and children? How many basketfuls of leftovers did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven."

21. He said, "Don't you understand that I'm talking about the twisted ideas the priests and leaders are feeding the people?"

Jesus Heals a Blind Man

22-23. When they reached Bethsaida, people brought their sick to Jesus. A blind man asked Him for healing. Jesus took the blind man's hand and led him out of the village. Then He touched the man's eyelids with a little saliva and told him to open his eyes.

24-25. The man did so and exclaimed, "I can see! But people look like walking trees." Then Jesus touched the man's eyelids again and told him to open his eyes as wide as he could. This time the man could see clearly.

26. Jesus said, "Don't go back into the village, but go straight home. And don't tell anyone what happened. Otherwise, so many people will come looking for Me that we could be accused of starting a riot."

Jesus Talks About His Death

27-28. From there Jesus and His disciples headed north. As they were walking along, He asked, "Who do people say that I am?" They answered, "Some think You're John the Baptist raised from the dead. Others think You're Elijah come back from heaven, or maybe one of the important prophets."

29-30. Jesus then asked, "Who do you think I am?" Peter answered, "You're the Son of God!" Then Jesus told them not to say that to others yet, because it would give the priests an excuse to have Him arrested.

31-32. Then Jesus told them that He must suffer many things. He would be rejected by the priests and teachers and be killed, but after three days He would come back to life. Peter said,

"Don't talk that way. I'll fight to stop it from happening!"

33. Jesus could sense that Satan was putting a bad spirit into the hearts of His disciples. So He rebuked Peter and said, "You're being influenced by Satan. That's why you're thinking about what's important to you, instead of what's important to God."

34-35. Later that day, as a large crowd was following, Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be My disciple must be willing to carry pain and follow Me. Anyone who makes his own life more important than Me will lose his life, but he who is willing to give up his life for Me will save his life eternally."

36-37. "What good is it if a man owns the whole world and loses heaven? Can a man buy his salvation?"

38. "If anyone is ashamed of Me and My words now, then I'll be ashamed of him when I sit as Judge and come back with the glory of My Father and the holy angels."

A Glimpse of Jesus Coming

9 Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "Some of you will be given a glimpse of what My second coming will be like."

2-3. Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to the top of a mountain. When they got there, Jesus was suddenly changed to look like what He will look like when He comes again. His robe was whiter than snow, and His face was shining like the sun.

4. Moses and Elijah were there too. They had come from heaven, and talked with Jesus about what would soon happen.

5-6. Peter said, "Lord, let's put up three holy tents, one each for You, Moses, and Elijah!" He was so excited and afraid that he didn't know what he was saying.

7-8. Suddenly a bright cloud appeared, and a voice said, "This is My Son, whom I love very much. Listen to what He says." Then the cloud disappeared and Jesus stood alone, looking as He always did.

9. As they came down the mountain, Jesus told them not to say anything about what they had just seen until after He had risen from the grave.

10-11. The disciples couldn't figure out what He meant by that. "We've been told that Elijah has to return before anyone can be raised from the dead. Why is that?"

12-13. Jesus said, "That's true. But the prophecies also say that God's Son will be rejected by His own people and be put to death so that the resurrection can take place. John the Baptist was like Elijah, but the leaders rejected him, and he was killed."

Jesus Heals a Young Boy

14. At the foot of the mountain they saw a large crowd of people gathered around the other disciples. The local leaders were questioning them.

15-16. But as soon as the people saw Jesus, they ran to meet Him. Jesus asked, "What's the discussion all about?"

17-18. Before they could answer, a man spoke up and said, "Teacher, I brought my young son here to be healed. A demon controls him. Sometimes it throws him down, and he starts foaming at the mouth. He grinds his teeth and stiffens his body as if he were dead. I asked Your disciples to heal him, but they couldn't. Please help him!"

19. Jesus said, "You people have such little faith! How much longer do I have to keep teaching you? How much longer do I have to be patient with you? Bring the boy here."

20. As soon as the demon saw Jesus, it threw the boy down. He began to roll around on the ground, foaming at the mouth.

21-22. Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been going on?" He answered, "Ever since he was a little boy. Many times the demon tries to throw him into the fire or the lake. If You can do anything for him, please help us!"

23-24. Jesus said, "If you have enough faith, anything is possible." The father cried out, "Lord, I believe! Please help me to believe more!"

25. By this time people were coming from all directions to see what was happening. Jesus said to the demon, "Come out of the boy and never go into him again!"

26-27. The demon let out a shriek, twisted the boy's body once more, and left. The people looked at the child and said, "He's dead!" Jesus reached down, took the boy by the hand, and helped him up.

28-29. Later, when Jesus and His disciples were in the house, they asked, "Lord, why couldn't we cast the demon out of that boy?" Jesus answered, "This can happen only by prayer and being close to God, and not by showing off."

Jesus Teaches the People

30. Then Jesus and His disciples left the area to get away from the people and to have some time alone.

31. This gave Jesus a chance to prepare them for what was coming. He said, "Soon the leaders will have Me arrested and turn Me over to the Romans to be crucified. But three days later I will rise from the grave."

32. They still didn't understand what Jesus was talking about, but they didn't want to ask any more questions.

33-34. When they reached Peter's house, Jesus said, "What were you discussing along the way?" They didn't answer, because they had been arguing about who would sit next to Jesus when He became king.

35. As He sat down, He gathered His disciples around Him and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be willing to be last and be a servant to everyone else."

36-37. Then Jesus called a little child to Him. He took him in His arms and said, "Anyone who encourages children to love Me loves Me. And whoever loves Me loves God."

38-39. Some days later John told Jesus, "We saw a man using Your name to cast out demons, and we stopped him because he wasn't one of us." Jesus replied, "You shouldn't have stopped him, because no one who uses My name against demons would also say bad things about Me."

40-41. "Whoever is not against us is for us. Even if someone gives you a drink of water because you belong to Me, he will receive his reward."

42. "Anyone who causes a little child to lose faith in Me or to sin deserves to have a stone tied to his neck and be thrown into the sea."

43-47. "If your hand, foot, or eye causes you to lose your faith or leads you into sin, it would be better to be without a hand, foot, or eye than to lose heaven and die forever."

48-49. "Someday God will clean the whole world with fire. It will not stop burning until everything that's bad is burned up and gone forever. Before then, everyone will be tested to see if they love Me."

50. "Love is like salt. It makes things taste good. So sprinkle a little love on your hearts and get along with each other."

Marriage and Divorce

10 Then Jesus crossed the Jordan River and continued toward Jerusalem. Again crowds gathered around Him.

2. Some of the priests and leaders came to trick Jesus into saying something for which they could arrest Him. They asked, "Is it right for people to get divorced?"

3-5. Jesus replied, "What did Moses say?" They answered, "Moses let people get divorced as long as they put it in writing." Jesus said, "That's true, because people were getting divorced for every little thing, so he made some rules for it."

6-9. "When God created Adam and Eve, He intended for them to stay together. Once people get married, they are to leave their parents and start their own home. They're no longer two people, but one. Don't separate what God has put together."

10-12. Later the disciples asked Jesus the same question. Jesus answered, "A man who gets divorced just so he can marry another woman is sinning. The same goes for a woman who wants to marry someone else."

Jesus Teaches the People

13-14. Some mothers came to have Jesus bless their children, but the disciples told them not to bother Jesus and to go away. When Jesus saw this, He said, "Don't send the mothers away. Let the children come to Me. They are part of God's kingdom."

15-16. "People need to accept the kingdom of God as trustingly as these little children do if they want to get to heaven." Then Jesus took the children in His arms, put His hands on each of them, and blessed them.

17. Later a rich young man came running down the road to catch up with

Jesus. He fell to his knees and said, "Good Teacher, tell me what to do to get to heaven."

18-19. Jesus said, "Why do you call Me good? Only God is good. Does this mean you believe that I'm the Son of God? You know the commandments: don't lie, steal, or cheat. Don't kill. Honor your parents, and so on."

20-21. The young man said, "I've kept the commandments since I was a child." Jesus said, "Well, there's one other thing you can do. Give your money to help the poor. That's like putting it in heaven. Then come and follow Me."

22. When the young man heard this, he turned away, because he loved his money more than he loved Jesus.

23. After he left, Jesus said to His disciples, "It's not easy for rich people to be part of the kingdom of God."

24-25. The disciples couldn't believe what they had heard. Then Jesus said, "It's hard for rich people to put God first. It's like a camel trying to squeeze through the eye of a needle."

26-27. This really confused the disciples because they believed that rich people were favored by God. So they said to themselves, "If rich people can hardly get into heaven, what about us?" Jesus heard it and said, "Anything is possible when people let God come into their lives."

28-29. Peter said, "We don't have money to give to the poor, as You told the rich young man to do. But we did leave everything to follow You." Jesus said, "No one who gives up what he loves to follow Me will lose out on heaven. Some will even leave their parents, their brothers, and their sisters because they love Me. God knows and will reward them for it."

30. "They'll be much happier in this life with Me in their hearts than if they

had all the money in the world. It won't always be easy to follow Me, but they'll have many brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers who love Me too. And they'll receive eternal life."

31. "There will be some surprises. Some that you think will be in heaven won't be there, and others that you think won't be there will be."

Jesus Nears Jerusalem

32. Jesus continued toward Jerusalem, with His disciples lagging behind. They were still trying to figure out what He meant by rich people having a hard time getting into heaven, but they didn't want to ask Him again. So Jesus slowed down to let them catch up with Him.

33-34. He said, "We're going to Jerusalem, but things won't be good. I will be arrested, sentenced to death, and crucified. People will make fun of Me, beat Me, spit in My face, and kill Me. But three days later I'll come back to life."

35. Then the mother of James and John came to see Jesus with her sons and said, "Master, we know You're willing to give people whatever they ask for. So could You do something for us?"

36-38. Jesus asked, "What is it?" She said, "Could my two sons sit next to You when You set up Your kingdom?" Jesus said to the them, "You don't really know what You're asking. You have to be as willing to sacrifice your lives for Me as I will for you."

39-40. They answered, "We're ready!" Jesus said, "I know you will suffer for Me. But who will sit next to Me in My kingdom is not for Me to decide, but My Father."

41. When the other disciples found out that James and John wanted to be first, they were unhappy.

42. Then Jesus called them all together and said, "You know how people do things in the world. If a person is in charge, he wants everyone else to serve him.

43-45. "That's not how it is in My kingdom. The one who wants to be great has to be willing to serve. And whoever is in charge of something has to serve others. Look at Me. I have not come to be served, but to serve and to give My life for people."

Jesus Heals a Blind Man

46-47. As they passed through Jericho, a large crowd followed them. Outside the city was a blind man named Bartimaeus sitting by the side of the road begging. He heard that Jesus was coming. So he started shouting, "Jesus, Son of David, help me!"

48-50. People tried to quiet him, but he shouted even louder, "Jesus, Son of David, help me!" Jesus stopped and said, "Bring the blind man here." They told the man, "Cheer up! Jesus wants to see you." The blind man jumped up and was led to Jesus.

51-52. Jesus asked, "What do you want Me to do for you?" The blind man answered, "Master, I want to see again." Jesus said, "Because you believe in Me, be on your way. You are healed." Instantly he could see! Then he followed Jesus to Jerusalem.

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem

11 As they neared Jerusalem, they stopped at a place overlooking the city called the Mount of Olives.

2-3. Jesus said to two of His disciples, "Go to that little village over there, and you'll find a young donkey that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone stops you, tell him that Jesus needs it and that you'll return it."

4-6. The disciples went to the village, saw the donkey, and started untying it. The people stopped them and asked, "What are you doing untying that colt?" The disciples told them that Jesus needed to borrow it and that they would bring it back. So the people gave permission.

7-8. The disciples took the colt to Jesus. Suddenly they realized why Jesus wanted it. So they put their robes on the young donkey. When Jesus got on, the people became excited. Some spread their robes on the road. Others waved palm branches and spread them on the road to welcome Jesus as their new king.

9-10. Some ran ahead and others followed shouting, "Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessings to the new king whom the Lord has sent." Then they shouted, "God bless the kingdom of David! Blessings on Him whom the Lord has sent! Hosanna to the king!"

11. When they reached the Temple, Jesus told the two disciples to return the donkey, and He went inside. He looked at everything going on in the Temple, but since it was already late, He and the disciples left for Bethany to spend the night.

12-14. The next morning, before breakfast, they headed back to Jerusalem. On the way Jesus was hungry. He saw a fig tree full of leaves, which should have had figs on it. But when He looked, there were none. Jesus said to the tree, "Never again will you pretend to have figs." The disciples heard what Jesus said, and wondered why He would talk to a tree that way.

15-16. When Jesus got to the Temple, He asked those who were selling pigeons or exchanging money in the courtyard to leave. When they refused, He opened the cages, tipped

over their tables, and refused to let them come back.

17. Then He sat down and started teaching the people. "This is God's house. It's a place where people can come to pray. It's not a place to sell things or to cheat people."

18. When the priests and the leaders saw what Jesus had done, they decided to get rid of Him. But they didn't want to arrest Him in front of the crowd, because the people loved Jesus.

19-21. Then Jesus and His disciples went back to Bethany for the night. The next morning they returned to Jerusalem. When they came to the fig tree, it was dead. Peter said, "Master, look! The tree You cursed yesterday is already dead!"

22-24. Jesus said, "If you put your full faith in God, you can do the same thing. You could tell a mountain to fall into the sea, and it would. If you have no doubts in your mind, God can do anything for you. When you pray and ask Him to help you to have more faith, He will."

25-26. "But first you must forgive each other. Then God will forgive you and answer your prayers. If you don't forgive others, God can't forgive you and give you what you ask for."

27-28. When they got to Jerusalem and went into the Temple, they found the priests and leaders waiting for them. They said to Jesus, "Who gave You the authority to do what You did yesterday?"

29-30. Jesus replied, "Let Me ask you a question first, then I'll answer yours. What do you think about John the Baptist's ministry? By whose authority did he do what he did?"

31. They stepped to one side and whispered, "If we say John did what God told him to do, He'll say, 'Then why didn't you listen to him?' If we

say that what John did was his own idea, the people will turn against us, because they believe God sent John."

32-33. So they went back and said to Jesus, "We can't answer Your question." Jesus replied, "Then I will not answer yours."

Wicked Caretakers

12 Jesus began teaching the people again. He said, "A landowner planted a vineyard. He built a wall around it to protect it, and dug a hole for a grape press. He built a watchtower to guard it. Then he rented it to farmers and left on business."

2-5. "When it was harvesttime, he sent one of his servants to collect his share. But the farmers beat the servant up and sent him away. So the owner sent another servant. They threw stones at him, wounding him badly, and then sent him away. They killed the third servant the owner sent. The others he sent, they either beat up or killed."

6-8. "The owner had only one person left to send, his son whom he loved very much. 'I'll send my son. They'll respect him,' he said. But when the farmers saw the son coming, they said, 'When the owner of a vineyard dies, it goes to the son. If there's no son, the vineyard goes to us. So let's kill him.' Then they grabbed the son, killed him, and threw his body over the wall."

9. "What do you think the landowner will do to those farmers? You know what he'll do. He'll have them arrested and tried for murder. Then he'll rent to people he can trust."

10-11. "Haven't you read in the Bible about the stone that the Temple builders rejected? They threw it away, but soon found it was the very one

they needed to fit the corner. That stone represents the Son of God."

12. When the priests and the leaders heard this, they wanted to arrest Jesus immediately. They knew that the parable was about them. But they didn't dare do it just then, because the people loved Jesus. So they left.

A Question on Taxes

13. A little later the priests and leaders tried to get Jesus to say something against the Roman government.

14-15. So they said, "Teacher, we know that You're honest and teach the truth. Do You think it's right for us to pay taxes to a foreign government? What do You think we should do?" Jesus replied, "Why are you trying to trick Me? Do you have a Roman coin? Let Me see it."

16-17. They gave Him one. He asked, "Whose picture is this on it?" They answered, "The Roman emperor." Jesus said, "Give the emperor what belongs to him and give God what belongs to Him." When Jesus said that, the priests and leaders just stood there. They had nothing to say.

Questions About Heaven

18. Then other priests and leaders who didn't believe everything the Bible said about heaven came. They too wanted to trap Jesus.

19. They said, "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies and his wife didn't have children, his brother should marry her so that she can have children to keep the property in the family."

20-23. "Now, there was a case where there were seven brothers who one after another married the woman. But for some reason each one died soon after they were married, leaving no children. Finally, the woman died. If they all go to heaven, whose wife will she be?"

24. Jesus answered, "Why are you caught up in such foolish questions? Is it because you don't know what the Bible says? Or is it because you don't know the power of God?"

25. "Have you ever thought that things in heaven are not exactly the way they are down here? When the dead are raised to life, they'll be like angels, who don't marry."

26-27. "You say you don't believe that people are resurrected. I'm sure you've read the story about Moses and the burning bush. God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' God is the God of the living, not the dead. So your idea that there is no resurrection is wrong."

Questions About God's Law

28. One young lawyer was really impressed with Jesus' answers. So he asked, "Teacher, which one of God's commandments is the most important?"

29-31. Jesus answered, "God's commandments can be reduced to two. The first one is to love God with all your heart and soul and mind. The other one is to love and care about your neighbor as much as you love and care about yourself. It's that simple."

32-33. The lawyer said, "That's a good answer. You're absolutely right. We should love God first with everything we have and then care about others. It's more important than all the offerings a person can give."

34. Jesus was pleased with the young man's remarks and said, "You're not far from the kingdom of God." After that, no one was brave enough to ask Jesus such tricky questions again.

Jesus Teaches the People

35-36. Jesus turned to the people and said, "Why do religious teachers say that the Messiah is the son of

David? David does call Him his son, but also his Lord. He even predicted that God would ask his Lord to come and sit next to Him until all enemies are destroyed.

37. "How can the Messiah be David's son and his Lord at the same time?" No one had the answer. The large crowd enjoyed listening to Jesus, but were puzzled why the religious leaders didn't.

38-40. Then Jesus said, "Be careful of teachers who dress to look important and enjoy being flattered and honored. They take advantage of widows by controlling their money, then pretending to be good. God will punish them."

41. As Jesus sat there teaching, He saw people tossing money into the offering box in front in the Temple. Some rich people showed off as they gave large offerings, wanting everyone to see what they gave.

42. Then a poor widow came along and quickly put in two pennies before anyone could see her, because it was so little.

43-44. Jesus said to His disciples, "Look at that poor widow over there. She dropped two pennies into the offering box. But she gave more than all the rich people. They gave offerings that they'll never miss, but she gave all she had."

Signs of the End

13 Later that afternoon, as Jesus and His disciples left the Temple, one of them said, "Master, look at these huge stones they used to build the Temple. It will last forever!" Jesus said, "Don't be so sure. The time is coming when this Temple will be destroyed. Not one stone that you see will be left on top of another."

3. When they got to the top of the Mount of Olives, they could look down on the city and on the beautiful Temple. Peter and his brother, Andrew, and James and his brother, John, spoke to Jesus privately.

4. "Lord, tell us more about the Temple. When will it be destroyed, and how can we tell when it's about to happen? Will that be the end of the world?"

5-6. Jesus answered, "Don't be deceived by what the priests and leaders are saying. Some men will tell you that they are sent from God, as I have been. They will fool many people."

7-8. "Before the Temple is destroyed, and again before the end comes, there will be wars and rumors of wars. Don't worry. The end is not yet. Nations will fight. And there will be more of this as time goes on. Also there will be more earthquakes, famines, and trouble everywhere. All these things will increase before the end comes."

9. "There will be other things, too. Some will be arrested for preaching the gospel. Others will be taken before kings and governments to be questioned about what they believe. Those who love Me will not be ashamed to share their faith with judges and kings."

10. "First, the gospel must go to all the world; then the end will come."

11-13. "When you're arrested, don't worry about what you're going to say. The Holy Spirit will tell you what to say. In those days even families will be divided. Some will take sides with kings and governments against those who love Me. People will not like you because you are loyal to Me. But God will help you hold on until it's over, and He will give you eternal life."

14. "When you see the Roman army coming against Jerusalem, it's time to

leave the city and flee to the mountains. They'll destroy the city and the Temple, as Daniel predicted.

15-16. "When you leave, hurry. Don't take time to pack; just go. If you're away, don't rush back home to get something.

17-18. "Those days will be hard on mothers with little babies. So pray that you won't have to leave home in the winter.

19-20. "Many of God's people will suffer. It will be the worst time for them since creation. But for their sake, God will intervene and reduce that time, or no one would survive.

21-23. "In those days people will tell you that they saw Me. Don't believe it. False messiahs will appear everywhere. People will say that God spoke to them, and they will work miracles to prove it. Don't be fooled. The reason I'm telling you this is not to scare you, but so you won't be surprised.

24-25. "Some of these things will happen before Jerusalem is destroyed, and others will happen just before the end. There will even be signs in the sky. For a short time the sun will get dark and the moon will stop shining. Showers of stars will fall from heaven.

26-27. "After that, I will come back in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. I will send the angels to gather My people from around the world and bring them to Me.

28-29. "Let me illustrate it this way. When you see a fig tree bud and blossom, you know that spring is here, and that summer is coming. In the same way, when you see these things you will know that the end is very near.

30-31. "Over the next few years things will happen very fast. Before you know it, the city and the Temple will be destroyed. What I'm telling you is as sure as there is a heaven and earth.

32-33. "But no one knows the day or hour when the end will come. Even the angels don't know, nor do I, but only the Father. So the best thing to do is to watch for these signs and pray, because you don't know when the end will come.

34-35. "I'm like a man who took a long journey. Before he left, he gave each servant his own work to do, and asked the doorkeeper to watch. That's what I'm asking you to do. You don't know when I'll be coming back.

36-37. "Don't get careless and fall asleep. What I told you is not only for you but also for those who will live near the end of time."

The Last Days of Jesus

14 Two days later was the Passover and the Festival of Bread, a special week of worship. The priests and leaders were still trying to come up with a reason to arrest Jesus without upsetting the people. They said, "Let's not try to do it during the Passover, because too many people are in town."

3. Meanwhile Jesus accepted an invitation to eat at Simon's house. Jesus had healed him from a bad skin disease. During the meal Mary came in with a small bottle of very expensive perfume. She sprinkled it on Jesus' feet and head.

4-5. Some said, "What a waste of money! That perfume could have been sold, and the money given to feed the poor." Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. God impressed her to do something special for Me.

6-9. "You will always have the poor with you, but I'll be with you just a few more days. She's preparing Me for burial. Wherever this gospel is preached, her kindness and love for Me will also be told."

10-11. That same day Judas went to the priests and offered to betray Jesus. They listened to his proposal, and gladly promised him thirty pieces of silver if his plan worked.

12. That evening the Passover was to begin. The disciples asked Jesus where He wanted to have the Passover meal.

13-15. Jesus said to two of His disciples, "Go back to Jerusalem. There you'll see a man carrying a large water-pot on his head. Follow him to a house. Ask the owner of the house if he has a room where we may eat together. He'll take you upstairs and show you a room big enough for all of us. Thank him and get things ready for supper."

16. The two disciples left and went to Jerusalem, and everything happened just as Jesus had said. Then they prepared for the Passover.

17-18. After Jesus and the other disciples arrived, they sat down to eat. Jesus said, "Tonight one of you will betray Me."

19-21. They were shocked. Each one said, "Lord, are You talking about me?" He answered, "It's the one who dips his bread into the main bowl with Me. Tonight I'll be arrested, and tomorrow I'll die, just as the Bible predicted. But I feel sorry for the one who will betray Me. It would have been better if he had not been born."

22. When they were ready to eat, Jesus took the bread, blessed it, and then passed it to the disciples. He said, "Take and eat this bread. It represents My body."

23-25. Then He took the cup of grape juice, blessed it, and passed it to the disciples. He said, "This represents My blood that I will shed for the sins of My people. It fulfills the promise My Father made in the beginning. I won't drink grape juice again until we eat together in heaven."

26-28. After eating, they sang a hymn and left for the Mount of Olives. As they walked along, Jesus said, "Tonight all of you will leave Me. The prophet Zechariah predicted this when he said, 'They will arrest the Shepherd, and the sheep will scatter.' But I will always love you. After My resurrection I'll meet you by the Lake of Galilee."

29-31. Peter said, "The rest might leave You, but I won't!" Jesus replied, "Peter, not only will you leave Me, but before the sun comes up and the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." Peter said, "No! Absolutely not! I would die for You before I would deny You." Then all the disciples said the same thing.

32-33. When they reached the little garden of olive trees called Gethsemane, Jesus told His disciples to stay near the entrance. Then He asked Peter, James, and John to come with Him. As they walked into the garden, Jesus became so heavy-hearted that He could hardly stand up.

34-35. Finally He said, "I feel so depressed. My heart feels as though it's ready to break. Stay here and pray for Me. I need to pray by Myself just now." Swaying, He walked a little way and fell to the ground and prayed that He would not have to go through this time of suffering.

36. He said, "Dear Father, I know You can do anything. I don't want them to kill Me. But if it has to be this way, Your will be done, not Mine."

37-38. Then Jesus got up, went back to the three disciples, and found them sleeping. He nudged Peter awake and said, "Why are you sleeping? Couldn't you stay awake and pray for Me for one hour? You need to pray not only for Me, but also for yourself."

39-40. Then He went back to pray.

Again He went through the same struggle as before. He didn't want to be arrested and killed, but doing His Father's will was more important. Then He went back to the three disciples again, but they were still sleeping. He gently tried to wake them up to pray, but they didn't move.

41-42. So He went and prayed a third time. When He finished, He came back to the three disciples and woke them up. He said, "I'm glad you had a good rest. But you've slept long enough, because the authorities are here to arrest Me. So you'd better get up. The one who turned against Me is here."

43. Jesus was still talking to the three disciples when Judas found Him. Behind him were Temple guards with torches and swords. And many people sent by the priests and leaders were there, armed with sticks and clubs.

44-46. Judas had told the authorities that the man he would greet with a kiss was the one to arrest. They could let the others go. Judas walked straight to Jesus and greeted Him with a kiss on both cheeks. As soon as he did that, the guards grabbed Jesus and arrested Him.

47. When Peter saw this, he pulled out his short sword. He swung it at the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. Jesus freed His hands, touched the man's head, and his ear was restored.

48-49. Then Jesus said, "Why do you need swords and clubs to arrest Me as if I were a criminal? Every day last week I was teaching in the Temple. Why didn't you arrest Me then? It would have been easier. But this is what the prophets predicted."

50-52. When the disciples heard that, they all ran and left Jesus standing alone. When one of the younger followers hesitated, the guards reached out to grab him, but he twisted out of his robe and ran away.

Jesus on Trial

53. Then they took Jesus to the high priest. All the leading priests and other religious leaders had been called to assist him.

54. Peter changed his mind and turned around. He decided to follow at a distance to see what would happen. As the guards took Jesus into the courtyard, Peter slipped in with the crowd and went over to the fire to warm himself.

55-59. Inside, the priests tried to find some reason to put Jesus to death. But they could find nothing. People testified against Him, but they contradicted themselves. Others twisted what Jesus had taught. They said, "We heard Him say that He would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days." But they didn't all agree on that, either.

60-62. Then the high priest said to Jesus, "Don't You have anything to say? Can't You hear what those people have said about You?" Jesus remained silent. The high priest said, "Are You the Son of God or not?" Jesus answered, "I am. And one day you will see Me coming in the clouds of heaven with the full authority of God."

63-64. When the high priest heard that, he angrily tore his robe and shouted, "We don't need more evidence to sentence Him to death. He made Himself equal with God!"

65. Then some people spit on Jesus. Others blindfolded Him and slapped Him in the face, saying, "Tell us, who hit You? If You're the Son of God, You should know!"

66-67. While this was going on, Peter was outside by the fire. One of the servant girls of the high priest walked up to Peter and asked, "You're one of the followers of Jesus, aren't you?"

68-69. Peter answered, "I don't know what you're talking about," and walked away. Just then a rooster crowed in the

distance. Later another servant girl saw him leaning against the courtyard wall. She exclaimed, "You are one of those I saw with Jesus. I know it!"

70-71. Again Peter lied and said he didn't know Jesus. Others joined in and said, "The girl is right. You are one of Jesus' disciples! Your clean language gives you away!" Peter started to curse and swear, saying, "I'm telling you, I don't know the man!"

72. Just then a rooster crowed a second time. That's when Peter remembered that Jesus had said he would deny Him three times before a rooster would crow twice. Heartbroken, he ran back to the garden, fell to the ground, and cried.

Jesus Before the Governor

15 As soon as it was daylight the high priest called an official meeting of the national council. They confirmed what the smaller group had decided. So they took Jesus to the Roman governor for sentencing.

2-3. Pilate asked Jesus, "Are You the king of the Jews?" Jesus replied, "It's just as you say." Then the priests accused Jesus of many other things, but Jesus remained silent.

4-5. Pilate again inquired, "Aren't You going to say anything? Don't You hear the charges they're bringing against You?" Jesus still said nothing. Pilate was amazed.

6-7. It was the custom at the Passover for the Roman governor to set a Jewish prisoner free as a goodwill gesture to the people. A Jewish man named Barabbas was a terrorist under the sentence of death. He had killed people during a riot against the Roman government.

8-10. The crowd started shouting, "Release a prisoner! Release a pris-

oner!" Pilate asked, "Do you want me to release Jesus?" He said that because he wanted to free Jesus.

11-13. The priests told the people to shout, "Release Barabbas! Release Barabbas!" Again Pilate responded, "If I let Barabbas go, what should I do with Jesus?" They shouted, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

14-15. Pilate said, "Why? What crime has He done?" The people shouted even louder for Jesus to be crucified. Finally Pilate gave in to the people and ordered Jesus to be whipped and crucified.

16-18. The Roman soldiers took Jesus to the courtyard and called the others to come and watch the fun. They put an old purple robe over Jesus' shoulders, made a crown of thorns, and forced it onto His head. They made fun of Him and shouted in His ear, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Then they laughed!

19. They hit the crown of thorns with sticks, pushing the thorns into His head. They spit in His face. Then they knelt down and cursed Him while pretending to worship.

20. When they finished having their fun, they stripped Him and whipped Him until His back was covered with blood! Then they put His own robe back on and led Him away to be crucified. A heavy wooden cross was laid on His shoulders. He staggered, then fainted under the load.

21. The soldiers realized that the cross was too heavy for Jesus to carry on His bleeding back. So they grabbed a man from the crowd, named Simon, and made him carry the cross for Jesus.

22-24. When they reached the top of the hill called Golgotha, or Hill of the Skull, they offered Jesus some wine mixed with drugs to kill the pain, but He refused it. Then they laid the cross down, made Jesus lie on it, and nailed His

hands and feet to the wood. They lifted the cross with Jesus on it, and dropped it into place. After that, they gambled to see who would get His robe.

25-26. It was about nine o'clock in the morning. The governor had ordered a sign nailed over Jesus' head that said "The King of the Jews."

27-28. Two thieves were crucified also, one on either side of Jesus. This is what the prophet Isaiah predicted when he said, "He will be counted as a criminal."

29-30. As the people came by, they shook their heads and shouted, "So You're the one who said You could destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! If You're so powerful, why don't You come down from the cross and save Yourself? Then we'll believe You!"

31-32. Also the priests made fun of Him and said to those standing nearby, "If He can really work miracles, why doesn't He work a miracle to save Himself? If He's really the Messiah, the King of Israel, as He claims to be, then why doesn't He come down from the cross so we can believe Him?" The two criminals also cursed Him.

33-34. At noon heavy clouds came rolling in across the sky and covered the whole area. It was so dark that people could hardly see. About three o'clock in the afternoon Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have You left Me?"

35. Some people said, "Listen! He's calling for Elijah to come and help Him!"

36. A Roman soldier ran up with a sponge and dipped it in a bucket of drugged wine. He put it on a stick and offered it to Jesus to kill the pain. But Jesus refused it.

37. Suddenly Jesus cried out, "It is finished!" Then He bowed His head and died.

38. At that moment the Temple curtain

at the entrance to the Most Holy Place was ripped in half from top to bottom.

39. When the officer in charge of the crucifixion saw the way Jesus had died, he said, "This man really was the Son of God!"

40-41. Some of the women, looking on from a distance, were Mary Magdalene, who had anointed Jesus' feet with perfume; Mary, the mother of young James and Joseph; and Salome, the mother of James and John. These women had helped Jesus when He preached in Galilee. Other women who loved Him were there also.

42. All this happened on Friday afternoon. Soon the Sabbath would begin.

43-45. Joseph, a respected leader who loved God, went to the governor and asked permission to take Jesus' body down from the cross and bury it. The governor was surprised to hear that Jesus was already dead, and sent for the officer to find out if this was true. When he heard that it was, he gave Joseph permission to bury Jesus.

46-47. With the help of others, Joseph took Jesus' body down from the cross. They wrapped it in a white linen cloth and laid it in Joseph's tomb in a nearby cave. Then they rolled a very large stone in front of the entrance to close it. The women watched and saw where they laid Him.

The Resurrection

16 In the evening, after Sabbath, the women went to buy some sweet-smelling burial spices to put on Jesus' body.

24. Very early Sunday morning they went to the tomb. On the way they said to each other, "There's a large stone covering the entrance to the tomb. Who will roll it away for us?" But when they got there, the stone had already been rolled away.

5. So they cautiously entered the tomb. There sat a young man in a shining white robe. Then the women were really scared.

6-7. But he said, "Don't be afraid. I know you're looking for Jesus. He's not here. He is risen! See, His body is gone. Go and tell the disciples, especially Peter, that Jesus will meet them by the Lake of Galilee as He promised."

8. The women ran back to the city as fast as they could. They were still stunned, yet so happy! They didn't stop to tell anyone (except the disciples) what they had seen.

9. Mary, whom Jesus had freed from demons and who had anointed His feet with perfume, also went to the tomb. When she saw that the stone had been rolled away, she turned and ran back and told the disciples that someone had broken into the tomb and had stolen Jesus' body.

10-11. Then she slowly returned to the tomb, crying all the way. When she got there, Jesus was standing there, alive! She became so excited that she ran back to the city to tell the disciples the good news. But they didn't believe her.

12-13. Later that day Jesus appeared to two believers who were on their way to a little town called Emmaus.

They also got excited after Jesus talked with them. They ran back to Jerusalem to tell the disciples that He was alive. But the disciples didn't believe them either.

14. That evening Jesus appeared to the disciples as they were eating. They couldn't believe their eyes. Jesus said, "Why didn't you believe it when others told you that I was alive? Where is your faith?"

15-16. Then He said, "Go and preach the good news to the whole world. Those who believe and are baptized will be saved, but those who don't believe will be held guilty.

17-18. "Those who follow Me and have faith will work miracles. They will overcome demons and speak in languages they've never learned. When poisonous snakes bite them or if by mistake they drink something poisonous, if God sees fit it won't even hurt them. They'll lay hands on the sick, and people will be healed."

19. Jesus stayed with His disciples for many days. Then He returned to heaven to be with His Father.

20. The disciples went everywhere preaching the good news about Jesus. And the Holy Spirit helped people believe the disciples by working miracles through them.

Luke

INTRODUCTION: *The third Gospel was written by Luke. He was a physician who traveled with Paul. Luke never met Jesus personally, but the Holy Spirit guided him to collect the stories about Jesus and put them in one book. He wrote this Gospel for the Greeks and then sent it to one of his friends. Luke wanted him to know how the Son of God came to earth, and that He was fully human. So he tells him about Mary, the angel, the shepherds, how Jesus grew up, and about how kind He was to everyone. There are more stories about Jesus in this Gospel than in the others.*

A Letter to a Friend

1 My dear friend Theophilus, let me tell you what has happened during these past few years, and what we Christians believe. We have many firsthand reports from reliable witnesses of what happened. This way you can know for sure that what I'm telling you is true.

5-7. During the days of Herod the king a priest named Zechariah was married to a woman named Elizabeth. Both of them lived by God's commandments. They had no children and were too old to have any.

8-10. One day it was Zechariah's turn to serve as priest in the Temple in Jerusalem. His responsibility was to go into the Holy Place to offer incense, which he did. A lot of people were outside praying.

11-12. Suddenly an angel appeared on the right side of the little altar of incense. Zechariah was surprised and too scared to move.

13-14. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. Your prayers have been answered. You and your wife will have a baby boy. You are to name him John. You both will be very happy because of him, and so will many others."

15-16. "He will do a great work for God, but will live a simple life. He

must not drink wine or alcohol. From birth he will be guided by the Holy Spirit, and he will bring many people back to the Lord

17. "He will point them to the Messiah and will preach with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will bring families back together. Parents will love their children, and children will love their parents. He will help them know what it means to be good and will point them to the Messiah."

18. Zechariah stammered, "But how will I know that this will happen? I'm too old to have children, and so is my wife."

19-20. The angel replied, "My name is Gabriel, and I stand in the presence of God. He sent me to tell you this good news. But since you doubted what I said, let me give you a sign. You will lose your voice until the baby is born; then your voice will come back."

21-22. Meanwhile the people outside were wondering why Zechariah was taking so long. Finally he came out, but he couldn't talk. The people knew from his gesturing that he had seen an angel.

23-25. After he finished his responsibilities, Zechariah went home. Not long afterward, his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant. She took special

care of herself, and said, "God has answered my prayer by giving me a baby in my old age."

Gabriel Talks to Mary

26-27. After Elizabeth found out she was going to have a baby, God sent Gabriel to the little town of Nazareth to a young woman named Mary. She was engaged to marry a carpenter named Joseph.

28-29. Gabriel appeared to Mary while she was praying. "Greetings, Mary," he said. "God loves you very much. He has a surprise for you. He has chosen you over all the women in Israel." Mary was not only afraid but confused, because she didn't know what Gabriel meant.

30-33. Gabriel continued, "Don't be afraid. God cares about you and will be gracious to you. You will become pregnant and have a baby boy. You are to name Him Jesus. He will be called the Son of God and will do great things. God will give Him the throne of David and will make Him king over His people. His kingdom will never end."

34-35. When Mary heard this, she said, "How can this be? I'm not even married." Gabriel said, "You will become pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit, and the Baby will be holy from the time it is born because He will be the Son of God."

36-37. "God has already blessed your cousin Elizabeth. She too is pregnant and carrying a baby in her old age. Soon she will give birth to a baby boy. God can do anything. With Him nothing is impossible."

38. Mary said, "I'm ready to follow God's plan for my life. I will gladly serve Him. Whatever He wants, let it be just as you say." Then Gabriel disappeared.

Mary Visits Her Cousin

39-42. Mary hurried to Zechariah's house to visit her cousin. When Elizabeth heard Mary's voice, the baby inside her jumped. Then she was filled with the Holy Spirit and said, "God has blessed you, Mary. You are the most honored woman in Israel. God will bless the baby you will have for Him."

43-45. "Who am I that the mother of our Savior should come to visit me? Even the baby inside of me jumped for joy. You are blessed because you really believed that what God said would happen."

46-47. Then Mary, also guided by the Holy Spirit, exclaimed, "I want to praise the Lord! I'm so happy, because God is my Savior. I love Him with all of my heart."

48-49. "I'm just His servant girl, but God has chosen me to give birth to His Son. People will now know me as the one who gave birth to the Messiah. God made all this happen. Bless His name forever."

50-52. "He will always show kindness to those who worship Him. He has scattered people who were proud. He has removed kings from their thrones and set up kings. He has exalted the poor and lowly."

53-55. "God feeds thousands with spiritual bread, while the proud and arrogant go away with hungry hearts. He has not forgotten to show mercy to His people. He promised Abraham that He would bless his people forever."

56. Then Elizabeth insisted that Mary stay with her. So she did for about three months, until Elizabeth's baby was born.

John Is Born

57-58. When it was time, Elizabeth gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

Because the delivery was easy, the relatives knew that it was the Lord's doing.

59-61. Eight days later it was time for little John to be circumcised. The relatives wanted to call the baby Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth declared, "No! His name is John!" They responded, "But no one in the family is named John."

62-65. So they decided to ask Zechariah. He indicated that he wanted something to write on. Then he wrote out, "The baby's name is John!" The relatives were surprised. All at once his voice came back, and he began praising God. The relatives were amazed, and the news spread everywhere.

66. All who heard about it said, "With all that has happened, what kind of man will this baby grow up to be?" From the moment that John was born, the Lord was with him.

67-69. While Zechariah was still praising God, the Holy Spirit came upon him. He told the people what would happen, saying, "Praise the Lord! He has come to save us! He has shown His power and will send the promised Savior from the family of David.

70-71. "The Lord spoke through His prophets long ago, saying, 'I will deliver you from your enemies and save you from the hand of the one who hates you.'

72-75. "God is merciful and will not forget the promise He made to Abraham. He will deliver us from our enemies so that we can serve Him without fear. He will help us do right as long as we live.

76-77. "Now you, my little son, will grow up to be a prophet for the Lord and prepare the hearts of the people to receive Him. You will help them to know the Savior, who will forgive their sins.

78-79. "You will help them know the kindness of the Lord, and God's grace will flood the world like the morning sun. It will shine on those in spiritual darkness and give them the peace of heaven."

80. So as little John grew, he learned to love God more and more. When he was grown, he went to live in the wilderness until the day that he began his ministry.

Jesus Is Born

2 About the time that Jesus was to be born, the emperor of Rome ordered everyone in his territories to register for taxes. They had to register wherever their father's family had come from. So Joseph had to go from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Even though Mary was about to have a baby, she also had to go.

6-7. When they got to Bethlehem, the Baby was about to be born. They quickly tried to find a place to stay, but there were no rooms left. So they found a stable where animals were kept, and that's where Jesus was born. Mary wrapped Him in strips of cloth and laid Him in a manger, a box where animals are fed.

8-9. Some shepherds were spending the night in a nearby field with their sheep. Suddenly the dark sky lit up, and the angel Gabriel appeared! The shepherds were very afraid.

10-12. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I have good news for people everywhere! Today the Savior was born in Bethlehem. You will find Him wrapped in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

13-14. Suddenly the whole sky was full of angels praising God and singing, "Glory to God in the highest! And on earth peace and goodwill to people everywhere."

15-16. After the angels disappeared, the shepherds said, "We must go and see this Baby for ourselves!" So they went to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the Baby wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger.

17-18. Then they knew that the Baby was the Savior. So they went into town and told everyone who would listen what had happened, especially about the Baby who had been born in a stable. Those who listened to the shepherds were amazed.

19-20. When Mary heard their story, she treasured it and often thought about it. The shepherds went back to take care of their sheep, but they praised God that the angels had told them about the Baby.

Jesus Is Dedicated

21-22. Eight days after the Baby was born, He was circumcised. They named Him Jesus, just as Gabriel had said they should. Then they waited the required forty days and brought Him to the Temple for a special dedication.

23-24. This was according to Jewish law, which said that every firstborn boy should be set aside for the Lord. Joseph and Mary also brought two pigeons for the required sacrifice because they were too poor to afford a lamb.

25-26. Now, there was an old man living in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was a good man, always praying that the promised Messiah would come and save them. The Holy Spirit had told him that before he died he would see the Messiah.

27-28. That morning the Holy Spirit prompted Simeon to go to the Temple a little early. That's when Joseph and Mary were there. When he saw the Baby, he knew it was the Messiah that he had prayed about for so long. He

took little Jesus in his arms, held Him up, and joyfully praised God, saying,

29-33. "O Lord, You have answered my prayers and kept Your promise to me. You have let me live to see the Messiah, the one who has come to save us! He is the light of the world, the glory of our people!" Joseph and Mary were surprised at his words.

34-35. Then he gave the Baby back to Mary and blessed her, saying, "This Child has been born to save us. Many of our people will believe in Him, but others will reject Him. This will show where their hearts really are. Their actions will be like a knife going through your own heart."

36-37. A prophetess named Anna was also in the Temple that day. She was very old and had been alone for some years, ever since her husband had died. But she came to the Temple as often as she could to pray and worship God.

38. Just as Simeon finished praying, Anna came in. When she saw the Baby, she too praised the Lord, and said that this was the Savior they had been looking for.

39-40. After Joseph and Mary dedicated Jesus, they went back home to Nazareth. That's where Jesus grew up. As He grew, he became stronger and wiser, and God blessed Him.

Jesus as a Boy

41-42. Once a year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover. When He was 12 years old, they took Him along.

43-44. After the Passover they started back home, together with some of their relatives and friends. They thought Jesus was in the group. But when evening came, He wasn't there. They asked if anyone had seen Him, but no one had.

45-46. When they couldn't find Him,

they decided to go back to Jerusalem. It took them another whole day to get back, and by then it was dark. Early the next morning they started looking for Him. They found Him in the Temple talking to the teachers, asking and answering questions.

47-48. The teachers were amazed that the Boy knew so much about the Bible. As Mary and Joseph listened, they too were amazed at His answers. On the way home Mary asked, "Why did You stay behind? Your father and I were worried sick looking for You!"

49-50. He said, "You didn't need to worry. I stayed behind to learn more about what My Father wants Me to do." But His parents didn't understand what He meant.

51. Jesus went with them back to Nazareth and obeyed them. Mary was His teacher and treasured the time she spent with Him. She kept fresh in her mind all the things that had happened.

52. Meanwhile Jesus continued to grow physically, mentally, and spiritually. People liked Him. He loved God with all His heart and was kind to everyone.

John the Baptist

3 When Tiberias was emperor of Rome, Pilate was governor over the land of Judah. The two Herod brothers were over adjoining territories. And the high priest Annas had recently retired, and Caiaphas, his son-in-law, had taken over. It was during this time that the Word of God came to John to begin His ministry.

3. So John began preaching in the territory by the Jordan River, telling the people to turn from their sins and be baptized as a symbol of being cleansed from sin.

4-6. This was what Isaiah had prophesied when he said that a man will

preach in the desert, telling the people to get ready for the Lord. They should make it easy for Him to come into their hearts by being humble and smoothing out the rough places in their lives. This would prepare the way for others to give their hearts to the Savior.

7. Sometimes John would ask, "Why are you here? Are you afraid of what's going to happen to you when the Lord comes?"

8. "Your hearts need to be changed. They need to be full of kindness and reflect the love of God. Don't keep telling yourselves that you belong to Abraham's family, so everything will be fine. Let me tell you that God can increase Abraham's family by turning stones into people. Just belonging to Abraham's family doesn't get you into heaven."

9. "God will chop down all trees that don't bear good fruit and burn them up. The value of a tree is not in its name, but in the kind of fruit it bears."

10-11. People asked, "What should we do to get ready for the Lord?" John answered, "If you have two coats, give one to someone who is cold. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry."

12-13. Tax collectors asked, "What should we do?" John said, "Stop collecting more taxes than you're supposed to and keeping the extra."

14. Soldiers asked, "What should we do?" He answered, "Don't be unnecessarily violent or lie about innocent people. Be satisfied with your wages."

15-16. John's preaching created such an expectation that some people wondered if he were the Messiah. John responded, "I baptize you with water, but Someone is coming who is so much better than I that I'm not even worthy to untie His sandals. He

will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

17. "When He comes, He will separate the wheat from the weeds. He will put the wheat in His barn and will burn the weeds with a fire that can't be put out."

18. John used many such warnings as he continued to preach the good news of the kingdom of God.

19-20. John also spoke against Herod for taking his brother's wife and marrying her. Herod didn't like that. Eventually he had John arrested and put in jail, which was another one of the bad things Herod did.

Jesus Is Baptized

21. One day Jesus came to John to be baptized. As Jesus came up out of the water, He knelt on the bank of the river and prayed.

22. Suddenly the sky opened, and the light of the Holy Spirit shaped like a dove hovered over Jesus' head. Then a voice from heaven said, "You are My beloved Son. I am very pleased with You."

23. Jesus was about thirty years old when He was baptized. He was the son of Mary and Joseph, who lived in Nazareth.

24-38. Jesus' human ancestry goes all the way back to David, to Abraham, to Noah and to Adam, who was created in the image of God.

Satan Tempts Jesus

4 After Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit led Him away from Jerusalem to a secluded place in the wilderness. He stayed there for forty days, fasting and praying for God to help Him in His ministry. Then Satan came and tempted Him.

3-4. The devil made himself look like an angel. He said, "If You really are the Son of God, why don't You turn some

of these stones into bread?" Jesus answered, "The Bible says that man can't live just by bread; he must also live by what God says."

5-8. Then the devil picked Jesus up and carried Him to a high mountain and gave Him a view of all the world and its riches. He said to Jesus, "I'll give all this to You, if You'll just bow down and worship me." Jesus answered, "Go away, Satan. The Bible says that we should worship only God."

9-11. Next Satan carried Jesus to the highest point on the Temple wall to look at the valley below. He said, "If You really are the Son of God, then jump. God sends His angels to protect those who love Him. The Bible says that He won't even let You stub Your toe on a rock."

12. Jesus responded, "You are twisting what the Bible says. We are not to test God's love. He does not say that He will protect those people who jump off high walls just to show off their faith."

13. Then Satan carried Jesus back to the wilderness and left Him for a while.

Jesus Goes Back to Nazareth

14-15. Jesus began His ministry in the area where He grew up, and the Holy Spirit was with Him. He preached God's good news in the synagogues and wherever He went.

16-17. He also preached in His hometown of Nazareth. One Sabbath He went to church as usual, and the priest asked Him to read the Scripture. He found the place in Isaiah and began to read:

18-19. "The Holy Spirit is with Me because He has told Me to preach God's good news to the poor, to heal broken hearts, to deliver people from the power of sin, to open the eyes of the blind, to free people from the forces

of evil, and to proclaim that this is the year of the Lord."

20-21. Then Jesus closed the book and said to the people, "This prophecy is being fulfilled right in front of your eyes."

22. The people were thrilled with what Jesus said and how gently He spoke. Someone asked, "Isn't that the carpenter's Son? How can He apply this prophecy to Himself? He grew up right here!"

23. Jesus answered, "I know the old saying that a physician should first treat himself before people will come to him. This means that you want Me to work a miracle so that you can believe what the Bible says about Me."

24-25. Then, with a sad voice, He said, "No prophet is accepted by his hometown people. This has been true of Israel since the days of Elijah. It had not rained for three years, and many in Israel could have helped Elijah."

26. "But God did not send him to one of them, because they were not interested in what he had to say. So God sent him to a widow in a neighboring country. She listened to him."

27. "There were sick people in Elisha's day, but he could not heal any of them, because they didn't believe what he said. But he did heal a man from Syria named Naaman because he believed him."

28-29. When the people heard Jesus say that non-Israelites were favored by God more than they were, they turned against Him. They grabbed Him, pulled Him out of the church, and led Him through the streets to the edge of a cliff, intending to push Him over.

30. But just before they got to the edge, Jesus gently freed Himself, quietly walked through the crowd, and went His way.

Jesus Begins Healing People

31. From His hometown of Nazareth, Jesus went to Capernaum, attended the synagogue, and preached to the people there.

32. There too they were amazed at His knowledge. While He spoke with authority, He did so in a kind and gentle manner.

33-34. A man who was controlled by a demon came to church. As Jesus was explaining the Scripture, the man cried out, "Leave us alone! You're here to condemn us! We know who You are! You're Jesus, God's Holy One!"

35. Everyone turned and looked at the man. Then Jesus commanded the demon, "Come out of him and leave him alone!" The demon obeyed, threw the man down, and left.

36-37. The people were speechless. They couldn't believe what they had just seen. Finally they said, "What kind of man is this, that even demons obey Him?" News about Jesus spread everywhere.

38-39. After church Jesus and His disciples went to Peter's house. When they got there, Peter's mother-in-law was in bed with a high fever. They asked Jesus to heal her. So He went to her bedside and told the fever to leave. It left, and she got right up and helped prepare the meal.

40. After sunset, when the Sabbath was over, many people came to be healed. Jesus put His hands on all of them, and everyone was made well.

41. Some people were controlled by demons. When Jesus told the demons to leave, they shouted, "You are the Son of God!" Jesus then told them to stop shouting. And they did. It was late when the people left.

42-43. At daybreak Jesus got up and went to a quiet place to pray. But people finally found Him early that morn-

ing and begged Him not to leave. Jesus said, "I would like to stay, but I have to go to other cities and towns to preach. That's why God sent Me."

44. So He left Capernaum and preached in many churches in other places throughout Galilee.

Jesus Calls Five Fishermen

5 One day as Jesus was teaching by the lake in Galilee, the crowds got so big that they almost pushed Him into the water.

2-3. Jesus noticed two fishing boats and some men nearby washing their nets. He climbed into the one belonging to Peter and asked him to push off a little from shore. He sat down and started teaching the people.

4-5. When He finished, He turned to Peter and said, "Row out a little where the water is deep and then throw out your nets." Peter said, "Master, we have fished all night and didn't catch a thing. This is the wrong time of day to fish. But we'll do as You say."

6-7. Then Peter and his men threw out the nets, and they caught so many fish that their nets almost broke. So they called to their partners to come and help them. Soon both boats were so full of fish they were close to sinking.

8-9. When Peter saw this miracle, he bowed down before Jesus and said, "Lord, I'm a sinful man. Why do You even care about me? I don't deserve it."

10. In the other boat James and John were also amazed. Then Jesus said, "Don't be so surprised at this catch of fish. From now on I want you to fish for people."

11. When they reached shore, they left their boats and this huge catch of fish with the workers and followed Jesus.

Jesus Heals More People

12. In a certain city a man had a bad skin disease. When he saw Jesus, he fell to his knees and said, "Lord, if You want to, You can heal me."

13-14. Jesus reached out, touched him, and said, "I do want to heal you." And immediately the disease disappeared. Then Jesus said, "Don't tell anyone. But go to the priest and let him examine you and declare you healed. Then offer a gift to God according to the law of Moses."

15-16. But the man told everyone. Then many people hurried to Jesus to be healed. So as not to cause a disturbance, Jesus left and went to a quiet place to pray.

17. A few days later, when Jesus was teaching again, priests from around Galilee and from Jerusalem came to listen. The power of God was with Jesus, and He began to heal again.

18. The house was full of people, with many standing outside, trying to listen to the discussion that Jesus was having with the priests. Some men came carrying their sick friend on a stretcher. They tried to get through the crowd, but couldn't.

19. So they went around to the back of the house, climbed up on the flat roof, and pulled their friend up behind them. Then they tore open the roof and lowered the stretcher with their friend on it right down in front of Jesus.

20-21. When Jesus saw how much faith they had, He looked at the paralyzed man and said, "Your sins are forgiven." When the priests heard that, they said to themselves, "Nobody but God can forgive sins!"

22-24. Jesus knew what they were thinking, so He asked, "Why are you so upset? Which takes more power? To forgive sins, or to heal a paralyzed

man? To show you that I have power to forgive sins, I will heal this man." He turned to the man and said, "Get up. Pick up your stretcher and go home."

25-26. The man stood up, picked up his stretcher, and walked away praising God. The people were stunned. They left and said to everyone they met, "We have seen the most amazing thing happen!"

Jesus Answers Questions

27. After Jesus left, He saw a tax collector named Matthew sitting in his tax booth. He collected taxes for the Roman government. Jesus stopped and said, "Follow Me!"

28-29. Matthew got up, turned things over to his assistants, and followed Jesus. Later Matthew invited Jesus and some fellow tax collectors to his house for dinner.

30-32. When the priests heard about it, they said to Jesus' disciples, "Why do you eat with such people as that?" Jesus overheard them and said, "People who are well don't need a doctor, but people who are sick do. I came to help, not those who think they don't need Me, but those who do."

33-35. The priests said, "John and his disciples are always fasting and praying, but You and Your disciples are always eating with people." Jesus said, "Have you ever heard of guests at a wedding fasting? The time will come when people should fast and pray, but that will be after I'm gone."

36. Then He said, "Nobody patches rotting clothes with new material, because the clothes are too old to hold the new patch, and they will tear again."

37-38. "Nobody puts fresh grape juice in old containers, because the old containers might crack and the juice would spill out. Fresh grape juice must

be put in new containers. Then it will be safe to carry."

39. "Some people like the old ways and don't want to change, because they say, 'The old ways are better.'"

Sabbath Questions

6 The next Sabbath Jesus and His disciples walked through a grain-field. They picked a few heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate the kernels. Some priests saw them and accused them of harvesting on the Sabbath, which was against the law.

3-5. Jesus replied, "Haven't you read in the Bible what David did when he was hungry? He went to the sanctuary, and the priest gave him and his men the holy bread, which only priests were supposed to eat. But David and his companions were really hungry. God's Son is Lord of the Sabbath. He's in charge and knows what's right and what isn't."

6-7. On another Sabbath, when Jesus was teaching in church, a man with a crippled right hand was there. The priests watched to see if Jesus would heal the man so they could accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath.

8-9. Jesus knew what they were thinking, but decided to heal the man anyway. He said to the man, "Come and stand up front." The man got up and stood there. Then Jesus said to the priests, "Is it right to do good on the Sabbath or not? Is it right to relieve people of pain on the Sabbath or to let them suffer until the Sabbath is over?"

10-11. The priests didn't answer. So Jesus said, "Hold out your arm." He did so, and his hand was healed. The priests were angry and walked out, wondering what they could do to stop Jesus.

Jesus Ordains His Disciples

12-13. When church was over, Jesus went to find a quiet place to be alone and pray. He prayed all night; then He felt better. When the sun came up, He decided to ordain His disciples and set them apart for ministry.

14-16. There was Peter and his brother, Andrew; James and his brother, John; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James the younger; Simon; Thaddaeus; and Judas.

17-19. After Jesus ordained them, they went down the hill and were soon surrounded by people from everywhere, many wanting to be healed. And Jesus healed them all. Some believed that if they could just touch Him they would be healed, and they were.

Jesus Teaches the People

20-21. Then Jesus looked at His disciples and said to the people, "You who are poor, the riches of God's kingdom belong to you. You who are hungry will be satisfied. You who are crying will laugh with joy.

22-23. "Good things can come out of bad situations even when people insult you, lie about you, or mistreat you because you belong to Me. When that happens, don't be sad. Be glad. God will reward you. In the past God's people had to go through some of the same things.

24. "I feel sorry for those who are rich and think only of making money. They will have to be satisfied with what they have here, because they will not make it to heaven.

25. "I feel sorry for those who over-indulge; they will be hungry and will long for heaven. I feel sorry for those who live for pleasure; they will cry out to be let into heaven.

26. "Don't listen to people who tell you only what you want to hear. That's

what your ancestors did when they listened to false prophets.

27-29. "Let Me tell you how to be happy. Love God and do good things for others, even for those who hate you. Ask God to bless those who say bad things about you. Pray for those who mistreat you. If someone hits you, don't hit him back. And if someone takes your coat, give him your shirt too.

30-32. "Help everyone who asks for help. If someone borrows something and doesn't return it, let him have it. Treat everyone as you would like to be treated. If you love only those who love you, what's so different about that? Even sinners love those who love them.

33-34. "If you do good only to those who do good to you, what's so special about that? Even bad people do that. And if you lend things only to those who will return the favor, what's so great about that?

35-36. "Love your enemies. Be kind and helpful. Don't worry about what you'll get out of it. God will reward you because you are His children, kind and helpful to all, just as He is. Be merciful to others, just as God is merciful to you.

37-38. "Don't judge or criticize. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give to help others, and God will give you many blessings in return. The way you treat others is how they will treat you.

39-40. "Can blind people lead blind people? No; they'll both fall into the ditch. Then why follow someone who doesn't know where he is going? To be My disciple, you need to follow what I have taught you.

41-42. "Don't keep looking at the minor faults of others when you have major sins of your own. How can you tell your brother his faults if you can't

see your own? You need to change your own life first; then you can help someone else.

43-44. "A good tree does not bear diseased fruit. And a diseased tree does not bear good fruit. You know if a tree is good or bad by the kind of fruit it produces. Nobody expects to find figs or grapes on a thorn tree.

45-46. "A good person will say and do good things. A person with bad thoughts will do bad things. What you are in your heart will come out in your speech and actions. Don't call Me your Lord if you're not going to do what I say.

47-48. "Anyone who listens to Me and does what I ask him is like a man building a house. First he digs until he finds solid rock; then he builds his house. When the rains and floods come, his house will stand because he built it on solid rock.

49. "Anyone who listens but doesn't do what I ask is like a man building his house on sand. When the rains and the floods come, his house will be swept away."

Jesus Heals a Servant

7 After Jesus finished talking to the people, He went to Capernaum. There a Roman captain's servant was terribly sick, and he loved his servant very much.

3-5. The captain had heard about Jesus' power to heal. So he sent some of the local Jewish leaders to ask Jesus to come and heal his servant. They went to Jesus and said, "A fine Roman officer needs Your help. He's been very good to us and even helped us build a new church."

6-7. Jesus started following them to the captain's house. But the going was slow because of the crowd. Then the captain sent his friends to say to

Jesus, "Lord, I don't feel worthy for You to come to my house. That's why I asked others to speak for me. You can just rebuke the sickness from there, and my servant will be healed.

8. "I know how authority works. I tell a soldier to go, and he goes. I tell another to come, and he comes. I tell my servant to do this, and he does it."

9. When Jesus heard this, He was amazed at the man's faith in Him. He turned to the people and said, "I haven't found this much faith among My own people!"

10. When the captain's friends got back to the house, the servant was completely well.

Jesus Raises a Boy to Life

11-12. The next day Jesus went to the little city of Nain, and lots of people followed Him. As He neared the city, He saw a funeral procession. A widow's only son had died. Relatives and friends were with her on their way to the cemetery to bury him.

13-15. When the mother passed by, Jesus' heart was touched. He said to her, "Don't cry." Then he went over to the dead boy, touched his body, and said, "Young man, get up!" The boy opened his eyes, sat up, and began to talk.

16-17. The people were speechless. Then they praised God, saying, "God has sent us a great Prophet! He has not forgotten us!" The news of what Jesus had done spread everywhere.

John the Baptist

18-20. The disciples of John the Baptist went to see him in prison and told him about all these things. Then John sent two of them to ask Jesus if He was the Messiah. So they went to Jesus and said, "John wants us to find out if You're the Messiah or not. If

not, how long should we wait for Him to come?"

21. Jesus told them to come along and watch Him work. They did, and they saw Him heal all kinds of diseases, including blindness and demon possession.

22-23. Then Jesus said to John's two disciples, "Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard. Tell him that the blind can see, the crippled walk, the sick are well, the deaf can hear, the dead are raised to life. And the good news of God's love is being preached. Tell him that people who believe in Me will be happy."

24-25. After John's two disciples left, Jesus said to the people, "When John was preaching and baptizing by the Jordan River, what did you go out to see? Grass blowing in the wind? Why did you go out to see him? Did you expect him to be modeling the latest fashions? Men who wear expensive suits live in cities, not in the wilderness.

26-27. "Then why did you go out there to see him? Wasn't it to see and hear a prophet? Of course! And you saw and heard a very special prophet. You saw the man God spoke about in Malachi when He said, 'I will send a special messenger to My people to prepare the way for My Son to come.'

28. "John was this messenger. This is what makes him special and more important than any other prophet. Yet you are even more privileged than John because of what you see and hear."

29-30. All those who had heard John preach and had been baptized, including the tax collectors, praised God for his ministry. But the priests and leaders rejected John's preaching and refused to be baptized.

31-32. Then Jesus said, "To what

should I compare people now? What are they like? Well, they are like two groups of children trying to play together. Some say, 'Let's play wedding and act happy.' But the others refuse. So they say, 'Well, then, let's play funeral and act sad.' The others still refuse. Then the first ones say, 'You don't know what you want.'

33-35. "When John lived in the wilderness and fasted and prayed, you said he was too strict. Then I come along. I mingle with people and eat with them, and you say that I'm a glutton, and a friend of tax collectors and sinners. But God's wisdom is seen by the fruit it produces."

Jesus Forgives Mary

36-37. A Pharisee named Simon invited Jesus and His disciples to his house for dinner. As they were eating, a woman whom Jesus had forgiven came to the house with a bottle of very expensive perfume.

38. She went to where Jesus was and knelt down. Tears filled her eyes. They fell on His bare feet, so she wiped them off with her long hair. Then she sprinkled some of the expensive perfume on His feet and head.

39. Everyone stopped eating and watched what was going on. Simon was very upset and thought to himself, "Jesus can't be a prophet, or He would know what kind of woman this is."

40. Jesus knew what Simon was thinking and quietly said, "Simon, may I ask you a question?" Simon answered, "Yes, Master. Go ahead."

41-43. Jesus said, "Two people owed a banker some money. One owed him 500 silver coins and the other fifty silver coins. When neither one could pay, the banker forgave them both. Which one do you think appreciated the banker more?" Simon answered,

"The one who owed more." Jesus replied, "You're right."

44. Then He looked at the woman sitting at His feet and asked Simon, "Have you noticed how kind she has been to Me? When I came, no one offered Me a basin of water to rinse the dust off My bare feet, as people usually do for guests. But this woman washed My feet with her tears.

45-46. "When I came, you didn't kiss Me on both cheeks, as the custom is. But this woman kissed My feet. And no one anointed My head with olive oil, which is the custom, but this woman sprinkled expensive perfume on My feet and head.

47. "People say that she's a bad woman. But she asked Me to forgive all that she had done, and I did. You can see how grateful she is. But those who think they're good because they had little to be forgiven show little gratitude."

48. Then Jesus said to the woman, "Don't feel embarrassed. You did the right thing, and your sins are forgiven."

49. When people heard that, they said to each other, "Where does He get the power to forgive sins?"

50. Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith in Me has saved you. Your sins are forgiven. May the peace of God be with you."

Parables

8 Soon afterward, Jesus went through the cities and villages preaching to and teaching the people. His disciples went with Him. A number of women who had been healed of sickness or evil spirits followed Him. They did all they could to help Him.

4. In one place a large crowd came together to listen to Jesus. So He started teaching them, using illustra-

tions from nature. He told this story:

5-6. "Once a farmer went out to plant seed. As he was sowing, some seeds fell on the side of the road. People stepped on them, and birds ate them. Some seeds fell on stony places. They came up quickly, but they didn't last, because they had no water.

7-8. "Other seeds fell among thorny weeds. When they came up, the weeds choked them so that they couldn't grow. But some seeds fell on good ground and produced a great harvest." Then Jesus said, "He who has ears to hear, let him listen to what I have said."

9-10. Later the disciples asked Jesus what that story meant. Jesus said, "I'll explain it to you because I want you to know what the kingdom of God is all about. But publicly I have to be careful what I say. As Isaiah said: 'People have eyes, but can't see. They have ears, but can't hear.'"

11-12. "The seeds in the parable are the words of God in the Bible. The side of the road represents the hearts of those who listen, but the devil comes and takes away what they've heard so that they won't believe and be saved.

13. "The stony places are the hearts of those who not only listen to but believe what they hear. But when troubles come, they give up.

14. "The seeds that fall among thorny weeds are the hearts of those who believe what they hear and take it seriously. But then they get so busy doing many things that the words of God don't have a chance to grow.

15. "The good soil represents the hearts of those who listen to the word of God, believe it, take it seriously, and obey. Together they produce a great spiritual harvest.

16-17. "Nobody lights a candle and then hides it, but sets it up so that people can see. God knows every-

thing. One day He will bring everything to light, what people did for Him and what they didn't.

18. "So be careful whom you listen to. If you share what you've learned about Me, you'll learn even more. But those who don't share what they know will lose what they have."

19. About this time Jesus' mother and stepbrothers came to see Him. But because of the crowd of people inside and out, they couldn't get into the house where He was.

20-21. Finally someone passed the word to Jesus that His mother and brothers were there. Jesus said to the people, "My real family are those who listen to God's word, take it to heart, and do what it says."

Jesus Works Miracles

22-23. One day Jesus got into a fishing boat and asked the disciples to take Him across the lake. After they rowed for a little while, Jesus lay down in the back of the boat and fell asleep. All at once the wind picked up, and suddenly they were in the midst of a bad storm. The waves crashed against the boat, and it began to fill with water.

24. The disciples were scared. They woke Jesus up and stammered, "Master, don't You care about us? We're about to go under!" Jesus stood up and commanded the wind and the waves to stop. Just like that, the lake was quiet, as if nothing had happened.

25. Jesus said to His disciples, "Where was your faith? Can't you trust God to take care of you?" They whispered to each other, "What kind of man is this! He even tells the wind and the waves to stop, and they do!"

26-28. Finally they reached the other shore. As they got out of the boat, a naked madman who lived in a nearby cave came rushing down the hill at

Jesus as if to kill Him. Suddenly he stopped, fell on his knees in front of Jesus, and cried out, "You are the Son of God! Please don't punish me!"

29. Jesus told the devil to come out of him and leave him alone. Up until now, everyone had been afraid of the man. Once when he was arrested and bound with chains, he flew into a fit of rage and broke the chains.

30-32. Jesus said to the demon, "What is your name?" The demon answered, "Many." Then he begged Jesus not to send them back where they had come from but into a nearby herd of swine. Jesus agreed.

33-34. So the demons left the man and went into the pigs. And the pigs ran down the hill into the lake and drowned. When the men taking care of the pigs saw this, they ran into town to tell the owners what had happened.

35. The owners came to see for themselves. They found the madman all dressed, sitting in front of Jesus in his right mind. They were afraid of what else Jesus might do.

36-37. The herdsmen told everyone they met what had happened. So the people came out to see for themselves. They too were afraid of what Jesus might do. So they asked Him and His disciples to leave.

38-39. The man begged Jesus to take him along. But Jesus said, "Go to your relatives and friends and tell them what I did for you." So that's what the man did. He shared the good news with everyone he met, telling them what a wonderful thing Jesus had done for him.

Jesus Raises a Little Girl to Life

40-41. When Jesus and His disciples crossed back over the lake, people were eagerly waiting for Him. A man named Jairus pushed his way

through the crowd, knelt in front of Jesus, and begged Him to come and heal his only daughter.

42. She was only twelve years old and was dying. Jesus started to follow him to his home. But because of all the people, the going was very slow.

43-44. In the crowd was a woman who had been sick for twelve years. She had spent all her money on doctors, but no one could help her. She squeezed through until she was quite close to Jesus. Then she reached out and touched His robe. When she did, she was healed just like that.

45-46. Jesus turned and asked, "Who touched Me?" Peter replied, "Master, with all this pushing and shoving, how can You ask such a question?" Jesus replied, "Somebody touched Me to be healed, because I felt power go out from Me."

47-48. When the woman saw that she couldn't hide, she squeezed again to the front of the crowd, fell on her knees, and confessed that she was the one. Then she told Jesus how long she had been sick, and that now she felt healed. Jesus said, "Don't be afraid. It was your touch of faith that made you well. May the peace of God be with you."

49. While Jesus was talking to the woman, one of Jairus' servants pushed through the crowd and told the father that his little girl had died.

50-53. "Don't be afraid," Jesus told the father. "Your little girl will be fine." When they got to the house, Jesus took no one else in with Him except Peter, James, and John. He told the people at the house to stop crying, because the girl was only sleeping.

54-55. Then Jesus went into the girl's room, took her by the hand, and said, "My child, it's time to get up." The girl opened her eyes, smiled, and got

up. Then Jesus told her parents to get her something to eat.

56. Her parents were amazed and for a moment were speechless. Then they hugged their little girl and cried for joy. Before Jesus left He told them not to tell what He had done, because He didn't want to call attention to His miracles.

Jesus Sends Out His Disciples

9 Jesus called His disciples together and gave them power to heal the sick and to cast out demons. Then He sent them out to preach the good news of God's kingdom. Before they left, He said to them, "Don't take anything with you, such as food, money, or even a change of clothes."

4-5. "When people invite you to stay with them, accept their invitation. When your work is finished, thank them and leave to go to another town. If no one in that town welcomes you, don't stay there. Shake the dust off your feet as a sign that they had a chance to hear the gospel but didn't want to. Then go to the next town."

6. So the disciples went and preached in all the towns in that area and healed people of all kinds of diseases.

John the Baptist

7. When Herod, the ruler of Galilee, heard about all the things that Jesus was doing, he was worried, because some people said that Jesus was really John the Baptist risen from the dead.

8. Others said Jesus was Elijah come down from heaven. Still others said He was one of the other prophets come back to life.

9. But Herod kept telling himself, "I had John killed. How could he come back to life?" Yet he was worried, and kept trying to see Jesus and talk to Him himself.

Feeding 5,000 People

10. After the disciples came back from preaching and healing, they told Jesus everything they had done. Then He took them to a quiet place where they could be alone and get some rest.

11-12. But people found them. So Jesus began teaching them and healing their diseases. Late in the afternoon the disciples said to Jesus, "We need to send these people home because some have come a long way. They'll have to stop and buy something to eat before it gets dark and the shops close."

13. Jesus said, "If the people are hungry, let's feed them." They answered, "How can we feed all these people? All we have is five small loaves and two little fish. You don't expect us to go to town and buy enough food for all of them, do You?"

14-15. There were about 5,000 men there that day, not counting women and children. Jesus said, "Tell the people to sit in groups of fifty." They did, and soon everyone was comfortable.

16-17. Then Jesus took the five small loaves and the two little fish, looked up to heaven, and blessed the food. He passed it to the disciples to give to the people. There was enough for everyone. After they had eaten, the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of leftovers.

Peter's Testimony

18-19. Sometime later, when Jesus and His disciples were alone, Jesus asked, "Who do people say I am?" They answered, "Some think You're John the Baptist come back to life. Others think You're Elijah. Still others think You're one of the prophets who has come back."

20-21. Jesus then asked, "Who do you

think I am?" Peter replied, "We believe that You're the Messiah, the Son of God!" They all agreed with Peter. Jesus told them not to tell anyone who He was, because it would upset the priests all the more.

22. Then Jesus warned the disciples about what would happen to Him. "I will have to suffer many things. My own people will reject Me, the priests and leaders will turn against Me, and I will be killed. But three days later I will come back to life."

23. He also said, "If anyone wants to be My disciple, he has to forget about himself and be willing to die for Me, just as I am willing to die for him."

24-25. "If someone thinks only of his own life, he'll lose out on eternal life. But if he's willing to lose his life for Me, he'll receive eternal life and live forever. What advantage is there if a man owns the whole world and loses eternal life?"

26-27. "If anyone is ashamed of Me, then I will be ashamed of him. When I come back, I will come with the same power and glory I had before. Some of you will have a preview of My coming and will see for yourselves what I have just told you."

A Preview of Jesus' Coming

28-29. About eight days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John up a nearby mountain to be alone and to pray. Suddenly Jesus' face was transformed, and His robe became as white as snow glistening in the sun.

30-31. Then two men appeared and started talking with Jesus about His upcoming crucifixion. One was Moses; the other, Elijah. They encouraged Jesus by reminding Him how many people would be saved by His death and resurrection.

32-33. The three disciples had fallen

asleep while Jesus was praying, but now they were wide awake and saw the whole thing. Then Moses and Elijah disappeared, and everything returned to normal. Finally Peter found his voice and said, "Lord, this place is holy! We need to pitch three special tents up here, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah!"

34-35. Peter was so excited he could hardly stop talking. All at once a huge cloud covered them, and they were afraid. Then a voice from the cloud said, "This is My Son, whom I love very much. Listen to Him."

36. Just as quickly as the cloud came, it disappeared, and Jesus and the three disciples were alone again. Then Jesus told them not to say anything about this to anyone until after He went back to heaven.

Jesus Heals a Young Boy

37-38. The next morning, when Jesus and the three disciples came back down the mountain, lots of people were waiting for them. A man cried out, "Teacher, I beg You to look at my son! Please help me. He's my only child and is possessed by a demon."

39-40. "The demon makes my son scream and foam at the mouth. Then he throws him down so hard that he has bruises all over his body. He never leaves him alone. I asked Your disciples to heal him, but they couldn't."

41. Jesus sighed and asked His disciples, "Where is your faith? How much longer do I have to be with you before you learn?" Then He said to the father, "Bring your son here."

42-43. As the father was bringing the boy to Jesus, the demon threw him down, and he went into convulsions. Jesus commanded the demon to come out of the boy and leave him alone. The demon left, and the

boy was healed. The people were amazed at the power of God and tried to understand how Jesus could do this.

44-45. Then Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "Don't forget what you just saw, because soon I will be arrested and will do nothing to free Myself." But they didn't understand what He was talking about, because they were still thinking about what had just happened. And they were afraid to ask Him what He meant.

Jesus Talks About Discipleship

46-48. A little later the disciples were arguing among themselves about which one was the greatest. Jesus had a little child stand next to Him. Then He said, "Anyone who accepts little children in My name accepts Me. And anyone who accepts Me into his heart accepts God. When you're willing to serve others, you are counted by God as great."

49-50. Then John said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name. We tried to stop him because he wasn't one of us." Jesus answered, "You shouldn't have done that. If a man is not against you, in that sense he is for you."

51-53. Jesus finished His work in the area and decided to go to Jerusalem. He sent some of His disciples ahead to tell the people in a Samaritan village that He was coming that way. But the Samaritans didn't want to see Him, because He was a Jew.

54. When James and John saw the people's attitude, they went back to Jesus and said, "Lord, these people have no respect for You. Why don't we call fire down from heaven, as Elijah did, and burn them up?"

55-56. Jesus answered, "You don't have a good attitude yourselves.

God sent Me here, not to destroy people, but to save them."

57-58. As they continued on their way, a man stopped Jesus, saying, "Teacher, I want to be Your disciple more than anything in the world." Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but I have no place of My own to lay My head. Are you sure you want to follow Me?"

59-60. Then Jesus turned to another man and asked, "How would you like to be My disciple?" The man answered, "I'll be happy to, but first I need to go home and make funeral arrangements for my father, who just died." Jesus responded, "Let those who don't know Me make those arrangements. You first need to decide if you want to be My disciple. Then I'll know that you will tell others back home about the kingdom of God."

61-62. Another man said, "Lord, I'll be a disciple of Yours. But first let me go home and say goodbye to my family." Jesus answered, "A man who puts his hand to the plow should not look back. Otherwise he's not fit for God's kingdom."

Jesus Chooses More Disciples

10 Jesus decided to add seventy more disciples to the twelve He already had. He sent them out two by two to various towns where He planned to go, to tell the people that He was coming.

2-4. He said, "There are many people to harvest into My kingdom, but so few workers. Ask God to send more workers to help bring in the harvest. You'll be like sheep going among wolves. Don't take a lot of things with you, and don't spend a lot of time talking to people about nothing. You're on a mission."

5-7. "When you find a place to stay,

thank the people for inviting you. If you find that they're peaceful people, stay there and bless them. If not, don't stay there to try to bring peace. If they're good people, stay until your mission is done. Don't keep moving from house to house, or people will think that you're hard to get along with. Eat what's set before you and don't complain.

8-9. "Do the same in all the other towns. Accept people's offer to help you. Stay with them and thank them. Heal those who are sick, and share with them the good news of the kingdom and what it has done for you."

10-12. "When you get to a town where people don't want you, be kind and say to them, 'We won't stay. We just wanted to offer you the blessings of God's kingdom.' Then shake the dust off your feet to show that it was their decision, not yours. God will hold that town guilty for not listening to you."

13. "I feel sorry for cities where I've worked so many miracles and they still don't believe. If other cities had seen these miracles, they would have repented and turned to God."

14-15. "In one sense cities where I have not been have a better chance of being saved than those where I have been. Those who see God's miracles and don't turn to Him are worse off than before. They're proud and don't care whether they're saved or not."

16. "When people listen to you, they're listening to Me. If they reject you, they're rejecting Me. And when they reject Me, they're rejecting My Father who sent Me."

17. When the seventy disciples returned, they were as happy as could be. They said, "Lord, we healed the sick, and even the demons obeyed when we used Your name!"

18-20. Jesus said, "I know; I also

looked ahead and saw Satan fall as quickly as lightning strikes. I have given you power over demons. They're like poisonous snakes, but they can't hurt you as long as you stay close to Me. Don't rejoice because the demons obey you. Instead, rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."

21-22. Jesus was happy about what the disciples had told Him. So He prayed, "Father, thank You. You are the God of heaven and earth. You don't reveal things to those who question Your wisdom, but to those who love You and believe You. Father, You trust Me because You know Me. And those who trust Me know You."

23-24. Then Jesus said to His disciples, "You are privileged to see the things I have done. Prophets and kings looked forward to My day. They longed to hear what I would have to say, but never had the opportunity."

The Good Samaritan

25-27. About this time a young lawyer decided to test Jesus. He asked, "Teacher, what do I have to do to be saved?" Jesus responded, "What does the Bible say?" He answered, "It tells us to love God with all our hearts and minds, and our neighbors as ourselves."

28-30. Jesus replied, "You're right. Do what it says, and you'll be saved." The young man asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answered, "Let Me tell you a story. A man left Jerusalem to go to Jericho. On the way he was attacked, robbed, and left to die."

31-32. "Soon a priest came along and saw the man, but decided that he was dead. He didn't want to touch a dead body, or he wouldn't be allowed to work at the Temple. So he walked on the other side of the road. Then a Levite came along. He saw

the man, but kept on going because he too was scheduled to work at the Temple that day.

33-34. "Later a Samaritan came along. When he saw the man, he felt sorry for him and stopped to help. He gave him first aid, put the wounded man on his own donkey, and took him to Jericho. He found a place to stay and took care of him all night."

35. "The next morning he paid the owner for two days and said, 'Let this man stay another day. He should be better by then. But if he needs to stay longer, I'll pay you for any extra time on my way back.'"

36-37. "Which one of these three men was neighborly?" The lawyer answered, "The Samaritan, of course!" Jesus replied, "You answered your own question. Now go and do the same."

Two Sisters

38-40. Then Jesus and His disciples went to Martha's house, where He had a standing invitation to come any time. While Martha rushed around trying to get dinner for thirteen hungry men, her sister, Mary, sat at Jesus' feet listening to what He had to say. Finally Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, can't You tell my sister to come and help me?"

41-42. Jesus answered, "Martha, you love to help people. But you're going through more trouble than necessary to feed us. Some things are more important than food. Your sister needs some spiritual help, so she's done the right thing, and she'll never lose what she has."

The Lord's Prayer

11 One day, after Jesus finished praying, one of the disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples to pray."

2-4. Jesus replied, "When you pray, say something like this: Our Father in heaven, may Your name be honored in all we do. May Your kingdom come into our hearts. Help us to do Your will, as angels do in heaven. Please give us what we need today. Forgive us our sins and help us to forgive others. Don't let us be tempted more than we can bear. Save us from the evil one."

5-6. Then Jesus said, "Praying is like this: Suppose that late one night a friend who had traveled a long way comes to see you unexpectedly. You're out of bread, so you go to your neighbor and ask to borrow some."

7-8. "Your neighbor says, 'Do you realize how late it is? It's midnight! Everyone's asleep! If I go looking for bread, I'll wake them all up.' Even though your neighbor hesitates, he will give you what you need if you persist in asking him."

9-10. "So don't be afraid to keep on asking God for what you need. He doesn't mind. Ask, and you'll receive; look, and you will find; knock, and the door will open for you."

11-12. "If a little boy asks his father for fish, will he give the boy a snake? Or if he asks for an egg, will he give him a scorpion?"

13. "If you know how to be good to your children and give them what they need, how much more is God willing to give you the Holy Spirit and whatever else you need?"

Jesus Heals People

14. Later that day a man who was controlled by a demon and couldn't talk came to Jesus. Jesus healed him, and the man could speak again. The people were amazed.

15-16. Then someone said, "He's using the power of the devil to do

this!" Others said, "He needs to prove that He's using the power of God before we believe Him."

17-18. Jesus said, "If people in a country keep fighting each other, that country won't last. If family members keep fighting each other, that family won't last either. If Satan fights against himself and his family of demons, how long would his kingdom last?"

19-20. "If I cast out demons by the power of the devil, then what power do your followers use to cast out demons? They'll tell you. But if I cast out demons by the power of God, then God's kingdom is right in front of you."

21-22. "When a strong man guards his house, everything is safe. But if a stronger man comes along and attacks him, he will take whatever he wants."

23. "Those who don't accept Me are really against Me. If they're not helping Me, they're influencing people away from Me."

24. "Those who are not for Me are like a man who has had a demon cast out of him. The evil spirit becomes restless because he can't find someone else to control. So he decides to go back to the man he came from."

25-26. "When he gets there, he finds that the man's heart is clean, but empty of God. So the demon invites seven fellow demons, and they all move in and make themselves at home. Now the man is worse off than he was before."

People Who Listen Are Blessed

27-28. As Jesus was talking, suddenly a woman from the crowd cried out, "Blessings on Your mother, who cared for You as a baby!" Jesus replied, "More important, blessings on those who listen to what God has to say, and do it."

29. As the people crowded around Him, Jesus said, "People are so hard to convince of truth. They're always looking for a miracle before believing what I say. The only big miracle they'll be given will be like what happened to Jonah on his way to Nineveh.

30. "Jonah came out of the sea as a sign to the people he preached to, and they believed him. So My resurrection will be a sign to you that God sent Me.

31. "The queen of Sheba is a witness against you. She came from a distant country just to hear what Solomon had to say. Someone who has even greater wisdom than Solomon is here.

32. "The people Jonah preached to are also witnesses against you. They listened to him and changed their ways. Someone who has an even more important message than Jonah's is here.

33-34. "No one lights a candle and then hides it, but he holds it up so everyone in the house can see. Your eyes are like candles. You see what you're looking for. When you look for what's good, that's what you'll see. When you look for what's wrong, you'll see that, too.

35-36. "If you keep looking for what's wrong, soon you'll be unhappy, and your life will be dark. If you look for what's good, you'll be happy, and your life will shine like a lamp that gives light."

Jesus Goes to Dinner

37-38. Then a religious leader invited Jesus to his house for dinner. He noticed that Jesus didn't wash His hands the way they did, but he said nothing.

39. Jesus said, "I know that you Pharisees wash your hands and your dishes in certain ways. But many of you don't care how clean your hearts are.

40. "That's rather foolish, don't you

think? God is interested in having things clean, not only on the outside, but also on the inside.

41-42. "Some leaders are very selfish. They need to help others. That's one way they can wash their hearts. They tithe the smallest things they grow in their gardens, but forget to love God. People should tithe their income, but most of all they should be kind.

43-44. "Those people love to be up front in church. And whenever they go out, they want everyone to notice them. They're spiritually dead inside but don't know it. In one sense they're like people who walk over unmarked graves—they don't realize what's buried underneath."

45-46. Then a young lawyer said, "Teacher, when You talk that way to the Pharisees, You make all of us look bad." Jesus answered, "Experts in religious law do the same thing. They come up with all kinds of rules and regulations, but they're more interested in themselves than in helping others.

47-48. "They like to build monuments to prophets who were killed by their ancestors. But their attitude is no different from that of their forefathers. By not changing their own lives, they're approving what their ancestors did.

49-50. "God knew ahead of time that some of His prophets would be killed and that others would be treated cruelly, but He sent them anyway. Unless people today change, they'll have to suffer the consequences of the evil actions of their ancestors.

51. "The whole thing started with Cain, who killed his brother Abel. It continued on down the stream of time, until people killed the prophet Zechariah right here in the Temple. There's no way people today can escape the results of doing that unless they turn back to God.

52. "You experts in religious law claim to have all the answers, but you don't understand the basic laws of heaven. By trying to get others to think the way you do, you're keeping people from being saved."

53-54. After dinner the Pharisees and the lawyers attacked Him with all kinds of questions, hoping He would say something wrong. From then on, they acted more like His enemies than His friends.

Don't Be Afraid

12 So many people came to see Jesus that He decided to lead them out of town, where they would have more room. While waiting for them all to be seated, He said to His disciples, "Be careful of the influence of the priests. Some are not honest."

2-3. "One day everything that is covered up will be uncovered, and everything done secretly will be made known. There's nothing you can say or do in the dark that God does not know."

4-5. Then He said to the people, "Don't be afraid of what others say about you or do to you. Even if they arrest you and kill you, after that they can't do anything more to you. Only God has the power to destroy forever. He's the one you should respect."

6-7. "Don't think of God as being unkind. He loves even the little sparrows. These birds are worth only pennies, yet He cares about each one. He cares much more about you. He even knows how many hairs are on your head. So don't be afraid. You're worth more to God than many sparrows."

8-10. "Whoever is not ashamed of me I will not be ashamed of when the judgment comes. If anyone tells others he doesn't know Me, I will tell God's angels that I don't know him. If

anyone says things against Me but repents, he can be forgiven. But if he says things against the Holy Spirit, how can God reach him so that he can be forgiven?"

11-12. "When they arrest you and take you to court, don't worry about what you're going to say. The Holy Spirit will help you."

Money

13-14. Someone said, "Teacher, talk to my brother and tell him to divide our inheritance with me." Jesus answered, "I didn't come to settle people's estates. Others can do that." Then He said, "Be careful not to think too much about money and become greedy. There's more to life than money."

15-19. "Let Me tell you a story: A rich man had a large farm, and every year he had large harvests. It wasn't long before he didn't know where to store it all. He thought about it and said, 'I know! I'll just build bigger barns. Then I'll retire, take it easy, and have a good time.'

20-21. "God was sorry that the man didn't think about heaven, because that night he died and left all his money for others to enjoy. That's how it is with those who think only of this life and not about the next one."

Worry

22-24. Then Jesus said to His disciples, "Don't worry about whether you're going to have enough to eat or to wear. Look at the birds. They don't have storage barns, because God takes care of them. If God cares about the birds, you can be sure that He cares even more about you."

25-26. "Not one of you can add to your height by just thinking about it. So why worry about other things that you can't control?"

27-28. "Look at the flowers. They don't fuss over choosing their own colors or how to look beautiful. If God makes such beautiful flowers, which bloom one day and die the next, don't you think that He cares about you? Just believe Him.

29-31. "Don't concentrate so much on what to eat and wear. That's what people who don't know God do. Your heavenly Father loves you. Put His kingdom first in your thinking, and He'll watch over you.

32. "Don't worry because there are so few of you. One day the Father will share with you His whole kingdom.

33-34. "Sell what you don't need, and use the money to help others. Buy clothes that last, so that you can save money and help the poor. Be generous. It's like putting money in the bank of heaven, where it'll be safe. Where you put your money is where your heart will be."

Two Servants

35-36. Jesus continued: "Always be ready for service with lamps burning. Be like servants who wait for their master to come back for his bride. When he comes and knocks, they'll be happy to open the door.

37-38. "Then, out of appreciation for what they've done, the master will have them sit down at the banquet table, and he will personally serve them. Whenever he comes to take his bride home, he'll be happy to see his servants eagerly watching and waiting for him.

39-40. "To watch and wait means to be like the homeowner who stayed awake because he had been told that a thief was coming. That's what you should do. Watch and be ready, because the heavenly Bridegroom might come when you least expect Him."

41-42. Peter asked Jesus, "Is this story for us or for everyone?" Jesus replied, "Which one of his servants does a master put in charge of things while he's gone? Isn't it someone he can trust?"

43-44. "When the master comes back and finds everything in order, the one he put in charge will be very happy. Then the master will put him permanently in charge of things because he's trustworthy.

45. "On the other hand, the man in charge may say to himself, 'Who knows when the master will be back?' So he does whatever he pleases and even mistreats people.

46-47. "One day the master suddenly returns when the manager isn't expecting him. Then that master will have to let the man go. The man knew what his master wanted him to do, but he didn't do it.

48. "If a person doesn't know what his master wants him to do and he doesn't do it, that's one thing. But if he knows and doesn't do it, he'll be held responsible. Those who know what's right are expected to do it.

49-50. "I have come to light a spiritual fire on earth, and it will soon be lit. The price for this will be my suffering and death. I just wish it were over.

51-53. "I have come to bring, not outward peace to the world, but peace in the heart. Yet even this will cause problems. In families some people will be for Me and some will be against Me."

54-55. Then Jesus said to the crowd, "When you see dark clouds you say, 'It's going to rain.' When you feel the wind coming from a certain direction, you say, 'It's going to be a hot day.'

56-57. "How can you be so sure about the weather and not recognize the signs that point to Me? Don't listen to what others say about Me. Make up your own minds.

58-59. "If someone wants to take you to court, try to settle things beforehand, or you could end up in jail. Once there, you won't leave till you've paid every penny that he asks for."

Accidents

13 Some people told Jesus about visitors who had come to the Temple in Jerusalem. They were caught in a riot and killed when soldiers came to break it up.

2-3. Jesus said, "Do you think that God didn't protect these men because they were bad? You need to stop judging people by what happens to them. Good and bad things happen to everyone. If you don't stop judging people, God can't give you eternal life. That's even worse than being killed."

4-5. "That incident is no different than what happened years ago to people who were killed when the tower in Siloam collapsed and fell on them. They were no more sinful than anyone else in Jerusalem. Unless you repent and ask God to forgive your sins, you will all perish."

Jesus Tells a Story

6-7. Then Jesus told this story: "A wealthy landowner planted a very special fruit tree in his orchard. After it grew, he expected to see some fruit. But there was none. He waited three years. Then he said to his caretaker, 'Let's cut that tree down. It's just taking up space.'"

8-9. "The caretaker answered, 'Let's give it one more chance. Let me work the soil and fertilize it a little more, and then we'll see what happens. If it still doesn't bear fruit, then I will cut it down.' The landowner agreed. That's how God works with people."

Jesus and the Sabbath

10-11. One Sabbath while Jesus was in church teaching, a woman came in all bent over. She had been crippled for eighteen years.

12-13. Jesus asked her to come up front. He said, "I want to help you." He touched her, and immediately she stood up straight and began praising God.

14. When the leader of the synagogue saw this, he became very upset because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, which was against Jewish law. He said, "There are six days in a week during which you can heal people, but not on the Sabbath."

15-16. Jesus answered him and the other local leaders, "You're being hypocrites. You lead your donkey or cow to water on the Sabbath, don't you? Is what I did any different? Shouldn't this woman be freed from her pain on the Sabbath?"

17. Then the men who had been criticizing Him felt ashamed. But the woman who was healed and all the other people were happy. They praised God for the wonderful things that Jesus was doing.

More Stories

18-19. Jesus said, "Let's see. To what should I compare God's kingdom? It's like a tiny mustard seed that a man plants in his garden. After it sprouts and grows, it produces a plant about twelve feet high. It's so big that the birds think it's a little tree, and they build their nests in it."

20-21. "How else can I describe God's kingdom? Well, it's like yeast that a woman puts in bread dough. The dough quietly rises and is soon ready for baking."

22-23. Then Jesus left and headed toward Jerusalem, teaching in little

towns as He went. At one place someone asked Him, "Will only a few people go to heaven? Do you have to be perfect to get there?"

24. Jesus answered, "Don't worry about how many people will go to heaven. Look at your own life first and keep your eyes on the road that takes you there. Many hope to get to heaven, but won't because all they do is talk about it. They never prepare for it.

25. "The kingdom of heaven is like the man who locks the door of his house. Then some people come and knock, saying, 'Please let us in.' The man will refuse and say, 'I can't let you in because I don't know who you are.'

26-28. "They will answer, 'We ate with you when you came and taught us. You know us!' But he will say, 'I really don't recognize you. Go away.' Then they will cry and be in deep pain, especially when they see Abraham and God's people inside and find themselves on the outside.

29-30. "In God's kingdom there will be people from all over the world. Some you least expect will be there because they accepted Me and changed their lives. Others who were popular but did not accept Me and change will be on the outside."

31. Later that day the local leaders said to Jesus, "You'd better leave the area, because King Herod is going to arrest You and have You killed."

32-33. Jesus replied, "The king is as tricky as a fox, always looking for what is best for himself. Tell him that God wants Me to heal the sick and cast out demons for two more days, and on the third day I will leave. God's plan is for Me to be arrested and killed in Jerusalem, not here.

34. "Many of God's prophets have been killed in Jerusalem. I would love

to save the city. The people are like baby chicks who don't listen to the mother hen. She senses danger and calls them to come under her wings and be safe, but they won't come. You refuse to come to Me, and soon it will be too late.

35. "When I'm killed, God's presence will leave the Temple. A few years later the Temple will be destroyed. Right now you don't appreciate Me. But when I come back it will be too late to say 'Blessings on Him who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Jesus Is Invited to Dinner

14 After church one Sabbath a local leader invited Jesus home for dinner. Some were watching Jesus to see if He would say anything they could arrest Him for.

2-4. Among the guests was a man with swollen arms and legs who asked Jesus to heal him. Jesus looked at the people and said, "Is it right to heal on the Sabbath?" No one answered. So Jesus healed the man, who went away rejoicing.

5-6. Then Jesus said, "If any of you had a child or animal fall into a well on Sabbath, would you leave it there because it was Sabbath? Wouldn't you pull it out as quickly as you could?" No one answered.

7-8. Jesus noticed how the leaders were choosing places of honor. So He told a parable. "When you are invited to a wedding, don't sit at the table up front with the relatives. One of them might come late and find you sitting in his place.

9-10. "Then the host will have to walk up front, ask you to move, and show you a seat in the back. That would be embarrassing. So when you're invited to a gathering, take a seat in the back. If there's room up front, the host will

say, 'Come, sit up here.' That will be an honor.

11. "Anyone who tries to make himself look great will one day be humbled. And anyone who humbles himself will one day be honored."

12-14. Then Jesus turned to the host and said, "Don't always invite your friends or relatives to dinner. Sometimes invite those who are never invited, such as the poor, the handicapped, and the blind. They can't invite you in return. But in heaven God will reward you for it."

The Big Banquet

15. When one of the guests heard that, he said, "How happy are those who know they will be at the wedding reception in heaven!"

16-17. Jesus replied, "That depends. Let Me tell you a story. One day a rich man decided to have a big dinner party. He invited his neighbors and friends. When things were ready, he sent his servants to tell those who had been invited that they could come to the banquet.

18-20. "But the invited guests had all kinds of excuses. One said, 'I just bought a piece of property and need to go look at it again.' Another said, 'I just bought a team of oxen and need to try them out.' Still another said, 'I'm newly married, so we won't be coming.'

21. "The servants came back and told their master what the people had said. He was very disappointed. Then he said, 'Go out and invite everyone you see, including the poor, blind, and handicapped.'

22-24. "It wasn't long before the servants came back and said, 'We did what you asked, but there's still room.' The master replied, 'Go and invite people outside the city until the hall is full. Those who turned down

my invitation will not be allowed in.'"

25-26. Then Jesus and His disciples left the house, and soon a large crowd followed them. Jesus turned to them and said, "If anyone wants to follow Me but cares more about what his family and relatives say, that person cannot be My disciple.

27. "If you're not willing to take rejection for My sake, even if it feels as if you're carrying a cross, you're not My disciple, no matter what you say.

28-30. "It's like this. When you plan to build a house, don't you first sit down and count the cost? If you start building and run out of money, people will say, 'Look! He surely wasn't smart. He started building a house but didn't have enough money to finish it.'

31-32. "Do you think that a king would go to war without first talking to his generals to see if they think that they can defeat the enemy? He will do this long before he sees the enemy coming. If he doesn't think that he can win, he'll send a message to the other king and ask for the terms of peace.

33. "In the same way, you can't be My disciple before you think it through and are willing to give up whatever holds you back.

34-35. "Salt is good for seasoning, but if it loses its taste it's no longer good, and people throw it out. Think about what I have just said."

The Lost Sheep

15 It seemed as if only those who were considered sinners were following Jesus. When the priests and leaders saw this, they said, "Look at the kind of people who follow Him. How can He associate with them and be a prophet of God?"

3-6. Jesus responded, "If you owned 100 sheep, wouldn't you be concerned if even only one of them was

missing? Wouldn't you go and look for it until you found it? And when you found it, wouldn't you put it across your shoulders and come back singing? You would share the good news with your neighbors and friends, and they would be happy with you.

7. "That's the way it is in heaven. When someone repents and comes back to God, the joy in heaven is even greater than it is over ninety-nine good people.

The Lost Coin

8. "It's the same way with a woman who has ten valuable coins, but loses one of them. What does she do? She cleans house looking for the coin until she finds it.

9-10. "When she does, she tells her neighbors and friends what happened, and they're all happy with her. That's how it is in heaven. The angels are very happy when someone who was lost turns to God."

The Lost Son

11-12. Then Jesus told another story. "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one wanted to leave home. So he said to his father, 'Father, let me have my inheritance now while I'm still young and can enjoy it.' Reluctantly the father gave him his share of the family money.

13-14. "A few days later the son left and went to another country, where he spent his money having a good time. Before long it was all gone. Then some tough times came to that country, and he couldn't find a job.

15-16. "Finally a man hired him to take care of his pigs. He didn't want the job, but had no choice. He got so hungry that even what the pigs ate looked good. But no one offered to feed him.

17. "Then he came to his senses and said, 'What am I doing here? My father has lots of people working for him, and they're all well paid. There's so much food that they throw the leftovers away! And here I am sitting on the ground starving to death!

18-19. "I'll go back home and say to my father, 'Father, please forgive me for what I've done. I have sinned against you and God. I'm not fit to be your son. But please let me work for you like a servant.'"

20. "As weak as he was, he headed for home. But while he was still a long way off, his father spotted him. His heart went out to his son, and he ran to meet him. He threw his arms around him, hugged him, and kissed him, and they both cried.

21. "When the boy got control of himself, he said, 'Father, please forgive me. I have sinned against you and God. I'm not fit to be called your son . . .'

22. "The father interrupted him by calling the servants, who came running: 'Quick, go back to the house and get my best robe, the family ring, and some sandals for my son.

23. "Then get the best calf we have, slaughter it, and prepare a banquet. It's time to celebrate. I thought that my son was dead, but he's alive! And he's home. He was lost, but is found.' The servants did so, and soon everyone was celebrating.

24-26. "The father's older son had been working in the field. When he came close to the house and heard music, he asked one of the servants, 'What's going on here?'

27. "The servant answered, 'Your brother is back! Your father was so happy to see him that he ordered a banquet to celebrate his homecoming.'

28. "The older brother was so angry that he refused to come to

the banquet. So his father went looking for him. When he found him, he asked him to come and join the celebration.

29. "But he refused and said to his father, 'All these years while my brother was gone spending the family money and having a good time, I was working hard to keep the family farm going. I did what you asked me to do. Yet you never offered to have a big party for me and my friends.'

30. "'But as soon as this sinning son of yours comes home, having spent his share of the family's money, you have a feast for him!'

31-32. "The father answered, 'Son, the whole farm is yours. Your brother has nothing. We're the only ones who care about him. So let's be glad that he's home. I thought that he was dead, but he's alive. Don't you think that's reason enough to celebrate?'"

The Clever Manager

16 Jesus said to His disciples, "A wealthy business owner had a manager who had been accused of cheating. So the owner called him in and said, 'What's this I hear about you? Let's check the records. If it's true, I'll have to let you go.'

3-4. "The manager said to himself, 'If I lose my job, what am I going to do? I'm too old to dig ditches. And I don't want to beg for food. I know what I'll do! I'll quickly do some favors for people; then they'll be my friends when I need them.'

5-6. "So he called in those who owed the company money and said to the first one, 'How much do you owe?' The man said, 'A hundred gallons of olive oil.' The manager said, 'Let's make it fifty.'

7. "He asked the next one, 'How much do you owe?' The man said, 'One thousand bushels of wheat.' The manager said, 'Let's make it 800.'

8. "When the business owner heard about it, he called the manager in and complimented him on being wise enough to think about his future. Then he fired him for his dishonesty. People plan ahead for this life, but not for the next life."

9-10. Then Jesus said to the Pharisees, "You need to plan ahead for the next life, just as you plan for your future here. Those who are dishonest in little things will be dishonest in big things."

11-12. "If you can't be trusted to manage someone else's money, how can you be trusted to manage spiritual things? If you can't be trusted at one job, how can you expect someone else to hire you?"

13. "No servant can obey two masters. He'll have to decide which one he loves more and serve him. You too will have to decide. You can't serve God and be a slave to money at the same time."

14-15. This really upset the Pharisees. So they made fun of Jesus because He was poor. Jesus said, "You give people the impression that being rich means that God loves you. But God knows your heart. That's what's important, not how rich you are."

16. Jesus continued: "Before John the Baptist came, all that the people had were the writings of Moses and the prophets to guide them. But now the kingdom of God is being preached more clearly, and people are responding."

17-18. "God's law never changes. It would be easier for heaven and earth to change than His commandments. Not one little letter will be taken away from God's law. So you can't change it to suit yourselves. You can't get a divorce just because you want to marry someone else, even if she's single."

The Rich Man and Lazarus

19-20. Then Jesus used a made-up story from the priests and said, "In your story you talk about a rich man and also a poor man named Lazarus. Every day Lazarus sat near the rich man's house begging.

21. "He was so hungry that he wished that he had some of the scraps of food that the rich man gave his dogs. These same dogs would come to lick his sores.

22. "As your story goes, Lazarus finally died, and the angels came and carried him to heaven to sit next to Abraham. Finally the rich man died too, but he went to hell.

23-24. "When he looked up, he saw Lazarus sitting next to Abraham. So he cried out, 'Father Abraham! Have mercy on me! Please send Lazarus to bring me some water, because the fire down here is very hot!'

25-26. "According to your story, Abraham answered, 'Remember how you ignored Lazarus when he was suffering and hungry? Now things are turned around, and it's your turn to suffer. Besides, there is a very deep gulf between heaven and hell that no one can ever cross.'

27-28. "The rich man replied, 'If no one can come to help me, at least send Lazarus to my five brothers to warn them so that they won't do the same things I did and end up here.'

29-30. "Abraham said, 'Your brothers have the Bible. They know what it says.' The rich man argued, 'They don't pay any attention to what it says. But if someone who died would go to them, they'd listen.'

31. "Then Abraham answered, 'If your brothers won't listen to the Bible, they won't listen to someone who died.' You need to recognize yourselves in your story."

Forgiveness

17 Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "Temptations come to everyone, but it's terrible when someone leads others into sin, especially little children. Any person who would do that would be better off dead.

3-4. "If your friend does something wrong that hurts you, tell him so. If he's sorry and stops, forgive him. Even if he does it seven times in one day."

5-6. One of His disciples asked, "Lord, help us to have more faith." Jesus answered, "If your faith is as small as a tiny seed, but you live by it, it will grow. With the right kind of faith you could tell a tree to replant itself in the ocean and it would, if God wanted it to.

7-8. "Suppose one of you had a servant feeding your cattle. When he's finished that job, do you serve him? No, you expect him to go and do whatever else needs to be done on the farm.

9-10. "After he does that, do you reward him? No, because he has done only what is expected of him. That's how it should be with you. You are God's servants and are expected to do what He has told you to do. When you've done that, you should say, 'We have done only what God has asked us to do.'"

Jesus Heals Ten Lepers

11-13. As Jesus continued on His way to Jerusalem, He came to a small town, and ten lepers came out to meet Him. They called out to Him, "Master, please have mercy and heal us!"

14-16. Jesus called back, "Go and show yourselves to the priest, and you'll be healed." On the way to see the priest, they were healed. When one of them saw that he was healed, he praised God and ran back to thank Jesus for what He had done for him. This man was a Samaritan.

17-19. Jesus said, "Didn't I heal ten lepers? Where are the other nine? Didn't any of My own people come back to thank Me?" Then He said, "I appreciate you. Now you may go back to your family. It was your faith that made all this possible."

Jesus Talks About His Return

20-21. Some priests asked Jesus, "When will the kingdom of God come?" He answered, "The kingdom of God is not coming the way you expect it. You can't point to it and say it's here or there, because it's inside of you."

22. Then Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "You'll soon look back on these days that I have spent with you and wish they were back. But it won't happen."

23-25. "So when people tell you that they saw Me here or there, don't believe them. My coming will be like lightning that lights up the whole sky. But before that can happen, I will have to suffer and be rejected by My own people."

26-27. "And before I return, things will be as they were in the days of Noah before the flood. Back then the people were all caught up with eating, drinking, entertainment of all kinds, and falling in and out of love. All of them ended up being destroyed by the flood."

28-30. "It was the same in the days of Lot. People were so caught up with eating, drinking, buying, selling, and building houses that they were destroyed with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. That's how things will be before I return."

31. "Not too many years from now you will have to make some quick decisions to save yourself. Whether you're in the city or on the farm, when you see the Roman army coming, don't stop to pack. Just go!

32-33. "Remember what happened to Lot's wife when she stopped and looked back. The Romans will come and surround Jerusalem, and those who delay in order to save their belongings will be killed, but those who are willing to lose them will live."

34-36. "There will be a lot of surprises in the last days. Two people might share the same bed or two women might be working next to each other, but one will be ready to meet Me and the other will not."

37. The disciples questioned, "When will this happen?" Jesus answered, "When you see vultures hovering nearby, you know that an animal is ready to die. So when God's people see the things I just told you, they will know that My coming is near."

The Widow and the Judge

18 Jesus told His disciples a story to encourage them to pray. He said, "In a certain city there was a very mean judge. In the same town there was a widow who pleaded with him to settle her case so that people wouldn't take her property."

4-5. "The judge kept refusing to take her case. Finally he said, 'I'm not afraid of anyone, but that widow keeps bothering me and is wearing me out. Next time she comes, I'll see to it that she gets justice.'"

6-7. Then Jesus said, "Why do you think this mean judge finally gave in? God isn't like that. He doesn't answer prayers just to stop people from bothering Him. Even though sometimes He waits before answering, He is eager to help anyone who comes to Him."

8. "The time will come when God will right all wrongs. But when I come back, how many people will I

find who will still have faith and love God?"

The Priest and the Tax Collector

9. Then Jesus told another story. He wanted to show them that doing everything just right but looking down on other people does not please God.

10-12. He said, "Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a priest and the other a tax collector. The priest went up front and prayed, 'Dear God, I thank You that I am not like people who lie, steal, cheat, and collect taxes from us to give to the Romans. I fast twice a week and bring You an honest tithe.'

13. "But the tax collector stayed in the back. He bowed his head and prayed, 'O God, I know I'm a sinner. Please help me!'

14. "This tax collector was forgiven, but not the priest. People who do good things for selfish reasons try to make themselves look great. But those who admit their sinfulness and humble themselves are great in God's eyes and will get the help they need to do better."

Little Children

15. Just then some mothers came with their children to have Jesus bless them. When the disciples saw how many there were, they told the mothers not to bother Jesus.

16-17. When Jesus saw what was happening, He said to His disciples, "Let the mothers bring their children. This is what God's kingdom is all about, trust and innocence. Unless you become like that, you cannot live with God in heaven."

A Rich Young Man

18-19. Then a rich young man came to Jesus and asked, "Good Teacher, what should I do to have eternal life?"

Jesus replied, "Why did you call Me good? Only God is good. Did you say that because you believe that I'm the Son of God?"

20-21. "But to answer your question, to have eternal life you need to love God and keep His commandments. Don't lie, kill, or steal; respect your parents; and so on." The young man said, "I've done that since I was a boy."

22-23. Jesus answered, "That's good, but you need to do one more thing. You need to overcome your love for money. Sell what you have and give it to the poor, and then come and follow Me." The young man became very sad, because he had lots of money and loved it.

24. When Jesus saw him walk away, He said to His disciples, "It's not easy for rich people to sell what they have and help Me proclaim God's kingdom. It's as hard for a rich man to give up his riches as it is for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle."

25-27. When the people heard this, they asked, "Who can make it to heaven if the smart and the rich can't?" Jesus answered, "With God's help, all things are possible."

28. Then Peter said, "Lord, we did what You asked this rich young man to do. We left everything to follow You."

29-30. Jesus replied, "Not one of you who has left his home, his parents, or his brothers and sisters to follow Me will lose his reward. In this life you will have heaven in your hearts, and then you'll be given eternal life besides."

Jesus Predicts His Arrest

31. When they were alone, Jesus said to His disciples, "Soon we will reach Jerusalem, and everything the prophets wrote about the Son of man will happen."

32-34. "They will arrest Me and turn

Me over to the Romans for execution. The soldiers will spit in My face, whip Me, and kill Me. But three days later I will rise from the grave." The disciples didn't understand what He was talking about. They were sure He was talking about someone else.

Jesus Heals a Blind Man

35-37. As they neared Jericho on their way to Jerusalem, a blind man was sitting by the road begging. Hearing a lot of people pass by, he asked what it was all about. They told him that Jesus was going by, and that many people were following Him.

38-39. So he cried out, "Jesus, please help me!" The people tried to quiet him, but he shouted all the louder, "Jesus, help me!"

40-41. When Jesus came near, He stopped and asked for someone to bring the blind man to Him. Then He asked, "What do you want Me to do for you?" The man answered, "I want to see again."

42-43. Jesus replied, "Your faith has made it possible." Instantly the man could see. Then he walked along with Jesus, thanking and praising God. When the people saw this, they too began praising God.

Jesus Visits Zacchaeus

19 As Jesus entered Jericho and was making His way through town, a tax collector named Zacchaeus wanted to see Him. He was short, and because of the crowd he couldn't quite see Him.

4-5. So he ran ahead of the people and climbed a tree. When Jesus came that way, He stopped, looked up through the branches, and said, "Zacchaeus, come down. I'm going to your house today."

6-7. Zacchaeus couldn't believe it. He

quickly climbed down and led the way to his house. When the people saw this, they were upset with Jesus for going to the house of someone who collected taxes for the Romans.

8. But Jesus went anyway. There He talked to Zacchaeus about how much God loved him. After listening to Jesus, Zacchaeus stood up and said, "Lord, I promise to give back four times the amount of unfair taxes I have taken from the people, and I will give half of everything I own to the poor."

9-10. Jesus said, "I can see that you've given your heart to God. You are a true spiritual son of Abraham. That's the reason I have come, to find and save those who are lost."

A Story About Money

11-12. Then Jesus went on His way. As they neared Jerusalem He said, "There once was a young man of royal birth who was in charge of a certain part of the country. The time came when he had to go back home to be crowned king.

13. "Before he left, he called in ten of his servants and gave them each a bag of money to do business with until he returned.

14. "But the people didn't like him. So before the ceremonies they sent a message to the palace saying that they did not want him to be their king. But the ceremonies went ahead anyway, and he was made king.

15. "A little later he came back to see how his servants had used his money.

16-17. "The first servant said, 'Sir, while you were gone I earned ten bags of money with the one bag of money that you gave me.' The young king replied, 'You're a good servant. I'm putting you in charge of ten cities.'

18-19. "The second servant said, 'Sir, I used the one bag of money and earned

five more for you.' The young king replied, 'You're a good servant. I'm putting you in charge of five cities.'

20-21. "The third servant said, 'Sir, here is your money. I kept it hidden. I have kept close watch over it because I was afraid that if I didn't, you would be upset with me.'

22-23. "The young king replied, 'You're afraid of me after I trusted you with my money? The least you could have done was to put it in the bank.'

24-25. "Then the king said to those nearby, 'Take the money back and give it to the servant who earned ten bags of money.' They answered, 'Sir, he already has more than enough.'

26-27. "The king replied, 'I need to make the best use of my money that I can. So I'm giving it to those who know how to use it. As for those who didn't want me to be king, the law requires that they be arrested and put to death in my presence.'"

Jesus Arrives in Jerusalem

28-29. When Jesus and His disciples got close to Jerusalem, they came to a couple of small villages near the Mount of Olives.

30-31. Then Jesus said to two disciples, "Go to that town over there. You will see a young donkey tied to a post. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone questions you, tell him that Jesus needs it."

32-34. So the two disciples left. And, sure enough, there was the young donkey. They started to untie it, but the owner stopped them. When they told him that Jesus needed it, he let them have it.

35-36. When they brought it to Jesus, they could tell that He wanted to ride it into Jerusalem. So they put their robes on the donkey and helped

Jesus get on. When the people saw this, they became very excited. "Is this our king?" they asked. Some ran ahead and spread their robes on the road for the donkey to walk on.

37-38. When they got to the top of the Mount of Olives, they could see Jerusalem and started praising God for all the things that Jesus had done. Then they started chanting, "Blessed be the King! He comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory to our great God!"

39-40. Some priests in the crowd shouted to Jesus, "Tell them to stop! Can't you hear what they're saying? They're making you their king!" Jesus said, "If they stopped, the stones would start shouting."

Jesus' Love for Jerusalem

41-42. As Jesus neared Jerusalem He stopped on the hilltop and looked down at the city. Tears filled His eyes, and He cried out, "O Jerusalem, this is your last chance to accept Me and have the peace that God planned for you. But you're so blind and stubborn.

43-44. "The time is coming when your enemies will surround you and will not give up until they conquer you. They will burn down the Temple and show no mercy to anyone, not even the children. This will happen because you would not listen to God's voice."

45-46. Soon they reached the Temple, and Jesus went inside. He ordered those who bought and sold animals for sacrifices to leave, declaring, "God says, 'My house is a house of prayer.' It is not a place to cheat people to make yourselves rich."

47-48. For the next couple of days Jesus taught in the Temple. The priests and leaders were determined to arrest Him and turn Him over to

the Roman governor to be executed. But because so many people were listening to Him, they decided to wait.

Jesus Questioned

20 During His last week Jesus was teaching the people in the Temple when the priests and leaders came to ask Him a question.

2-4. They asked, "Who gave You the authority over the Temple to do what You did?" Jesus answered, "Let Me ask you a question first, then I'll answer yours. Who gave John the Baptist the authority to do what he did?"

5-6. They stepped to one side and said to each other, "If we say John got his authority from God, He will say, 'Then why didn't you do what John said?' If we say that John got his authority from somewhere else, we'll be in trouble with the people, because they believe that John was a prophet."

7-8. So they said to Jesus, "We can't answer your question because we don't know who gave John his authority." Jesus replied, "Then I don't have to tell you who gave Me My authority."

Wicked Caretakers

9. Jesus told the people a story. "A man owned a large vineyard. He hired some people to care for it, and then he left on business.

10-12. "At harvesttime he sent one of his servants to collect the profits. But the caretakers beat up the servant and sent him away. So the owner sent another servant, and they beat him up, too. The owner sent a third servant, and they did the same to him.

13-14. "Then the owner said, 'I know what I'll do. I'll send my son. He's so nice that they won't be able to help liking him.' But when the caretakers saw him, they said, 'Let's kill him.

According to the law the property will then go to us.'

15-16. "So they grabbed the owner's son and killed him. What do you think the owner will do to those men? He will have all of them arrested and executed. Then he'll put others in charge of his vineyard." The priests and leaders responded, "God's vineyard will never be taken away from us."

17. Jesus asked, "Tell Me, what does the Bible mean when it says that the stone the Temple builders threw out was the very one they needed? Let Me tell you. That stone represents God's Son.

18. "Those who love God's Son will be heartbroken for their sins and will be changed. But those who reject Him will be destroyed."

19. The priests and leaders knew that Jesus was talking about them. They wanted to arrest Him, but they were afraid to do it in front of all the people.

Paying Taxes

20. So the priests sent some young men to ask Jesus a question that they hoped would get Him to say something against the government. This would give them an excuse to arrest Him.

21-22. The young men asked Jesus, "Teacher, we know that You're honest and don't just say things to please people. You always teach the truth. Tell us, is it right to pay taxes to a foreign government?"

23-24. Jesus knew that they wanted to trap Him. So He asked, "Do you have a Roman coin?" They gave Him one. He then asked, "Whose picture is this?" They answered, "The Roman emperor's."

25-26. He said, "Give the emperor what is his, and give God what is His." They were surprised at this simple answer and knew that they couldn't have Him arrested for that.

Resurrection From the Dead

27-28. After this, a group of leaders came to ask Jesus about the resurrection of the dead, which they didn't believe in. They said, "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies and has no children, his brother should marry the widow and have children. That way the property will stay in the family."

29-33. "We know of a case in which seven brothers died, one after the other. Each one had married the widow, but none of them had children. Finally, the woman died. Whose wife will she be in heaven?"

34-36. Jesus replied, "You're thinking of the way things are down here. But in heaven people will not marry. There's no need to have children, because people won't die. They'll live forever, as the angels do."

37-38. "When God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, He said that He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that He would keep His promise to them. They would be with Him and live with Him forever. So there has to be a resurrection, not just death."

39-40. Teachers who overheard this said, "Master, You have given the right answer." After that, no one tried to trap Jesus with questions again.

The Messiah

41-44. Then Jesus asked, "Why do people believe that the Messiah will come from the line of David when David called Him Lord? He even said that the Messiah would sit next to God. How can he be both David's Lord and his son?"

45-46. He waited, and then turned to His disciples and said, "Be careful of priests and teachers who walk around in long robes and expect people to give them the best seats at every meeting and at every meal."

47. "Yet they take advantage of widows and the elderly, even cheating them out of their houses. Then they come to church and offer long, beautiful prayers. God will not forget what they have done."

Offerings

21 Just before leaving the Temple, Jesus saw some rich men putting money in the offering box in a way so that everyone would notice. Then He saw a poor widow come and quietly drop in two pennies. Jesus said to His disciples, "That widow gave more than all those rich men, because she gave all that she had."

Signs of the End

5-6. As Jesus left the Temple, His disciples drew His attention to the huge stones that made up its buildings. Jesus responded, "The time is coming when the Temple will be destroyed in spite of its huge stones."

7-8. The disciples were stunned and asked, "Master, when will this happen? How can we know? What will be the signs?" Jesus answered, "First, be careful that you're not deceived. Many will come claiming to be the Messiah, saying that the end of the world is near. Don't be deceived."

9-10. "When you see military buildups and political unrest, don't get discouraged. These things have to happen. But that's not the end. Before the end comes, there will be lots of wars, peace treaties, and alliances."

11. "Nature itself will not be normal. Earthquakes will occur in many places, and famines and disease will be everywhere. There will also be unnatural signs in the sky."

12. "But before these things happen, some of you will be arrested and taken before rulers and governors. Some will

be persecuted and put in prison. And all because of Me.

13-15. "This will give you a chance to witness to them. But don't worry what you're going to say. I'll be there to help you.

16. "Don't be surprised if your friends and members of your own family turn you in. They may even have you killed.

17-19. "People won't like you because of Me. But don't forget that they can't touch one hair on your head without God's letting it happen. So hold on to your faith, and God will give you eternal life.

20-22. "When you see Jerusalem surrounded by the Roman army, then you'll know that the Temple will be destroyed. That's when you need to get out of the city and go to the mountains. This is the punishment that Moses said would happen to Jerusalem for its disobedience.

23-24. "Those days will be especially hard on mothers with little children, because the whole country will be in turmoil. Many will be killed, and some will be taken prisoner and scattered everywhere. From that time on, Jerusalem will be controlled by other people until all the prophecies are fulfilled.

25-26. "Before the end comes, strange signs will occur in the sun, moon, and stars. Nations will be in turmoil, and their leaders won't know what to do. Nature itself will not be normal. There will be disasters on land and in the sea. Men's hearts will fail for fear of what might happen next.

27-28. "Then I will come back in power and glory with all My holy angels. When these things begin to happen, stand tall and lift up your heads, because I will soon come to take you home."

29-31. Then He said, "Look at the

trees. You can tell that it's spring because the leaves are coming out. In the same way, those living at the end will be able to tell that God is about to set up His kingdom.

32-33. "I'm telling you, this generation will not pass away until Jerusalem is destroyed. Heaven and earth can pass away, but not what I'm telling you.

34-35. "So be careful that you don't get so caught up with parties, sports, and shopping that these things sneak up on you, without your even knowing it. Many people everywhere will be caught by surprise.

36. "So watch and pray that God will help you not to be influenced by the wickedness of the last days, so that you can stand before Me as My people."

37-38. Every day during that week Jesus taught in the Temple. At night He went to the Mount of Olives to pray. Then early in the morning He would return to the Temple, and the people would come and listen to Him.

The Last Supper

22 It was just a few days before Passover, celebrating freedom from slavery in Egypt. The priests and leaders tried to figure out how to arrest Jesus and have Him killed before visitors filled the city.

3-6. Then Judas gave in to Satan. He went to the priests and leaders and offered to help them get Jesus. They gladly agreed to give him thirty pieces of silver. Judas agreed, and waited for the right time to show them where to find Jesus, when there wouldn't be people around Him.

7-8. It was the practice at the time of the Passover for people to get together at sundown to eat the Passover meal. So Jesus said to Peter and John, "Go and find a place and get things ready for us."

9-11. They answered, "We're not from here, and we don't know anyone." Jesus replied, "Just go into the city. As soon as you get there, you'll see a man carrying a waterpot on his head. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he goes into, 'Our Master asked us to look for a room where we could eat the Passover meal together.'"

12-13. "He'll show you an upstairs room all furnished. Then you can get things ready." The disciples went into the city, and everything happened just as Jesus had said.

14-16. When it was time for supper, Jesus and the other disciples arrived. Then He said to them, "I have been looking forward to eating this Passover meal with you before I die. We won't celebrate the Passover again until we're together in the kingdom."

17-18. Then He took the cup of grape juice, blessed it, and said, "Drink from the cup. I won't drink this again until we're together in heaven."

19-20. Then He took the bread, blessed it, broke it in half, and passed it to the disciples. He said, "This bread represents My body, which will soon be sacrificed for you. So when you get together like this, remember Me." Before passing the cup to the disciples, He said, "This cup represents My blood, which I will soon pour out for you."

21-22. He also said, "The time has come for Me to die. I've already been betrayed by someone here at the table. But I will obey My Father and do His will. I just feel sorry for the man who betrayed Me."

23-24. The disciples started asking each other which of them would do such a thing. This renewed the argument about which one of them was the most loyal and would sit next to Jesus in heaven.

25-26. Jesus said, "In this world kings and rulers exercise authority over people and think of themselves as being a blessing. But that's not how it is in God's kingdom. Those who will be honored are those who are humble and live to serve others."

27. "At a banquet those who are honored sit down and are served. That's how all of you acted when we came here this evening. Who washed your feet? I did, because I came to serve, not to be served."

28-30. "I want to thank you for staying by Me throughout My ministry and facing all the problems you had because of Me. So you will have a share in My kingdom. We will eat together like this again, and you will help govern My people."

31-32. Then Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Satan wants to test your loyalty to Me. He wants to separate you from Me the way a farmer separates chaff from wheat. But I am praying that your faith does not fail. After you see how weak you are, you'll be better able to help others to be strong."

33-34. Peter vowed, "I will always be loyal to You. I will follow You to prison and to death!" Jesus replied, "Peter, let Me tell you something. You have too much confidence in yourself. Before the rooster crows, you will deny knowing Me three times."

35-36. Then He asked His disciples, "When I sent you out to preach the gospel, what did you take along?" They answered, "Nothing." He said, "From now on you'll face harder times. So take along what you'll need—extra clothes, shoes, money, and even a small butchering sword for meat."

37. "I'm telling you this because people won't always invite you into their homes, as they did before. As Isaiah

said: 'They will treat the Messiah like a criminal.' In some places they won't treat you much different."

38. The disciples looked around and said, "Lord, we've got two short swords and are ready to fight now." Jesus answered, "You missed the point. But it's time to go."

Jesus in Gethsemane

39-40. Jesus made His way to the Mount of Olives, and His disciples followed. When they reached the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus took just Peter, James, and John with Him. He asked them to pray so that they would not be overcome by Satan's temptations.

41-42. Then He left them and walked a little way, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if it is Your will, please don't let them put Me to death. But if it has to be that way, Your will is more important than anything else."

43-44. Then an angel came and gave Jesus the extra strength He needed to do God's will. Jesus prayed this way twice more, even more earnestly. Sweat that looked as red as blood dripped from His forehead.

45-46. Finally He returned to the three disciples. He had hoped to find them praying. But they were sound asleep. This time He woke them up, saying, "Why did you sleep when you should have been praying? You need to pray that you won't give in to Satan's temptations."

Jesus Arrested

47-48. About then Judas was entering the garden with a mob. He saw Jesus, walked right up to Him, and kissed Him on both cheeks. Jesus asked, "Why do you betray Me with the kiss of a friend?"

49-50. The disciples said, "Lord, do

You want us to fight for You now?" But Peter didn't wait. He pulled out his short sword and swung it at the high priest's servant. The man moved his head just in time, but the blade sliced off his ear.

51-53. Jesus said to Peter, "Stop!" Then He reached out and touched the servant's head, and just like that, he had his ear back. Then Jesus said to the priests, "Why are you coming to arrest Me in the dark of night, as if you're catching a thief? You could have arrested Me when I was teaching in the Temple all week."

Peter Denies Knowing Jesus

54-55. Then they arrested Jesus and took Him to the palace of the high priest for trial. The guards took Him inside. But some people built a fire in the courtyard to keep warm. And Peter joined them.

56-58. One of the servant girls looked at Peter and said, "This man is one of Jesus' disciples!" Peter retorted, "I'm not!" Then someone else said, "Yes, you are one of His disciples!" Peter answered, "I am not!"

59-60. Later another person said, "There's no doubt that he's a disciple, because he's from Galilee!" Peter insisted, "I don't know the man." Then he began to swear, using some very bad language. While he was still speaking, a rooster crowed.

61-62. As Peter glanced into the courtroom, Jesus turned and looked at him. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the rooster crows tonight, you will say three times that you do not know Me." Then Peter ran back to the garden, fell on his knees, and cried for a long time.

Jesus Mistreated

63-65. Inside the courtroom the high priest gave the Temple guards permission to make fun of Jesus. So they blindfolded Him, slapped Him, and said, "If You're a prophet, tell us who slapped You!" They did other such things to make fun of Jesus.

66-67. As soon as it was daylight the leaders and chief priests came together to make the trial official. They said to Jesus, "Tell us, are You the Messiah or not?" Jesus answered, "Even if I told you in plain language, you still wouldn't believe Me."

68-69. "And if I took the time to discuss it with you, you still wouldn't believe it, because you don't want to let Me go. But soon I will be sitting next to God with all the authority and glory that I had before."

70-71. They asked in chorus, "Are You telling us that You are God's Son?" Jesus answered, "Yes." When they heard that, they cried out, "That's it! We don't need any more evidence. He has condemned Himself!"

Jesus Taken to the Governor

23 Then the high priest ordered Jesus to be taken to Pilate, the Roman governor. When they got there, the priests accused Jesus of telling people not to pay taxes and saying that He was their new king.

3. Pilate asked Jesus, "Is this true? Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "What you just said is true."

4-5. After asking Jesus some more questions, Pilate said, "I find no reason to condemn this man. He should be let go." The priests shouted, "He's a troublemaker! He's caused trouble from Galilee to here!"

6-7. When Pilate heard that, he asked someone to check to see if Jesus was

born in Galilee. Then he said, "King Herod is in charge of Galilee, and he's in town right now. Take Jesus to see him." So that's what the priests did.

8-9. Herod was glad to see Jesus. He had wanted to meet Him because he had heard so many things about Him. Herod wanted to see Jesus work a miracle. He also asked Jesus many questions, but Jesus just stood there quietly and said nothing.

10-12. This made the priests mad, and they began accusing Jesus in an even louder voice. Then Herod had the guards put an old royal robe over Jesus' shoulders, and they all laughed at the new king. Then they took Him back to Pilate. From that day on, Pilate and Herod were friends.

13-15. When the priests got back to Pilate, he questioned Jesus again. He said, "I have carefully examined the prisoner and don't find Him guilty of the things you say. King Herod didn't either."

16-17. "I'll order Jesus whipped, and I hope that will satisfy you. Then I'll let Him go." Every year at Passover time Pilate set a Jewish prisoner free as a gift to the people. This year he planned to do the same.

18-20. When the crowd heard that, they shouted, "Don't let Him go! Turn Barabbas loose!" Barabbas was a murderer who had stirred up the people against the Roman government. Pilate did not want to release him. He wanted Jesus to go free.

21-22. But the crowd shouted louder, "Don't release Jesus! Crucify Him!" Again Pilate said, "Why do you want Jesus killed? He's not a criminal. As I said, I will order Him whipped and let Him go."

23-25. So the Roman soldiers whipped Jesus until His back was bleeding. But this did not satisfy the crowd as Pilate

had thought it would. They kept shouting for Jesus to be killed and for Barabbas to be released. Finally Pilate gave in. He let Barabbas go and ordered Jesus to be crucified.

Jesus Is Crucified

26. Then the soldiers put the heavy cross on Jesus' bleeding back and led Him away to be crucified. But the cross was too heavy. So the soldiers took a man named Simon from the visitors who were watching and made him carry the cross for Jesus.

27. Lots of people lined the streets as the soldiers made their way outside the city to a rocky hill for the crucifixion. Many mothers whose children Jesus had healed were in the crowd crying.

28-29. Jesus said to them, "Don't cry for Me, but for Jerusalem and your own people, because a terrible time is coming. Women who have no children will be glad, and those who do will wish they didn't have any.

30-31. "Things will be so bad that people will wish they were dead. If the Romans treat Me this way when I'm innocent, can you imagine just how they will treat the people of Jerusalem who will rebel against them?"

32-33. Two men who had been thieves and followers of Barabbas were also scheduled to be crucified. When they got to the top of the rocky hill called Calvary, they nailed Jesus' hands and feet to the cross. They put His cross between the two criminals.

34. As the soldiers were nailing Jesus to the cross, He said, "Father, forgive these men. They don't know what this is all about." After putting the crosses in place, they gambled to see who would get Jesus' robe, because it was well made and worth keeping.

35. The crowd watched everything

that was going on. Then the priests started making fun of Jesus. They laughed and said, "He worked miracles for others, but He can't save Himself. If He's the Messiah, let Him come down from the cross."

36. The soldiers put a sponge on the end of a long stick, dipped it in some wine mixed with drugs, and held it up to Jesus' mouth to take away the pain. But He wouldn't take it.

37-38. Then they made fun of Him again, saying, "If You're the King of the Jews, then save Yourself!" They said this because Pilate had ordered a sign nailed to the cross over Jesus' head that read: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. It was written in three languages.

39-41. Then one of the thieves started to make fun of Jesus. "If You're the Messiah," he said, "how about saving Yourself and us?" But the other one stopped him. "Don't you fear God after all the things You've done? In a few hours we'll be dead. We're getting what we deserve. But this man is innocent!"

42-43. Then he turned to Jesus and said, "Lord, I believe in You! Please don't forget me when You set up Your kingdom." Jesus answered, "I promise you today that when I set up My kingdom, you will be there."

Jesus Dies

44. By this time it was noon, and Jesus had been hanging on the cross for three hours. Suddenly dark clouds appeared and covered the whole city and the surrounding area, lasting until three o'clock in the afternoon.

45. The sun was completely hidden, and it was very dark. At the Temple the priests were getting ready to offer a lamb for the evening sacrifice. Suddenly the huge curtain covering the Most Holy Place ripped down the middle from top to bottom.

46-47. At that moment Jesus called loudly, "Father, I give My life to You!" Then He bowed His head and died. When the Roman officer heard His cry and thought about everything that had happened that day, he praised God and said, "There is no doubt that this was a good man!"

48-49. Many of the people who came to watch the crucifixion lowered their heads and groped their way in the darkness back to the city. Only the friends of Jesus were left, including some women who were watching from a distance.

50-51. Among the followers of Jesus was a member of the Jewish high court whose name was Joseph. He was a very honorable man and had voted against arresting Jesus.

52-53. He went to the governor and begged for the body of Jesus so he could bury it. Pilate agreed. So Joseph, Nicodemus, and John took the body down from the cross. They put it in a little burial cave nearby that belonged to Joseph. Then they rolled a huge stone in front of it to cover the entrance.

54-56. This was Friday afternoon, and soon the Sabbath would begin. The women stayed by until Jesus was buried. Then they went home to prepare burial spices and ointment. When the sun went down and the Sabbath began, they rested according to the commandment.

Jesus' Resurrection

24 After the Sabbath, very early Sunday morning, the women went back to the tomb with their spices and ointments. When they got there, they found that the huge stone had been rolled away, and that the cave was empty.

4-7. They stood there shocked and

confused. Suddenly two angels appeared, and the women were afraid. Then one angel said, "Why are you looking in a tomb for someone who is alive? Jesus isn't here. He's risen! Don't you remember what He told you?"

8-11. Then the women remembered. So they ran back to Jerusalem to tell the good news to the disciples. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph were three of these women. The disciples had a hard time believing them. But the women insisted it was true.

12. Finally Peter decided to check things out for himself. He ran to the tomb and found it empty, just as the women had said. As he looked into the cave, he noticed that the graveclothes were neatly folded and laid to one side. So he went back, puzzled as to what could have happened.

Late Sunday Afternoon

13-14. That afternoon two followers of Jesus left Jerusalem to go to the little town of Emmaus. As they walked along, they talked about all the things that had happened.

15-16. Suddenly they realized that Someone was behind them. They asked Him to join them. Jesus did, but He did not let them recognize Him.

17-18. He asked, "Why are you looking so sad?" Cleopas answered, "Don't you know what happened in Jerusalem this weekend? You must be a stranger, because everyone is talking about it."

19. Jesus said, "Tell Me what happened." They asked, "Haven't you heard about Jesus? He was a mighty prophet. He worked all kinds of miracles and preached God's good news everywhere He went."

20-21. "But the priests and leaders turned Him over to the Romans, who

crucified Him. We were hoping that He was the Messiah, that He would free our country and then set up His kingdom. But today is the third day since He died.

22-24. "Besides that, some women went to His tomb this morning and found it empty. His body was gone! They said that two angels appeared to them and told them that Jesus had risen. But no one believes it. So the disciples checked out the story. They also found the tomb empty. But they didn't see Jesus anywhere."

25-26. Jesus said, "I'm sorry to hear that. But there's no reason to be sad. You need to believe what the prophets predicted. They said that the Messiah had to die before He set up His kingdom."

27. Then Jesus told them in detail what Moses and the prophets had predicted would happen. He knew that they needed to put their faith in what the Bible said about Him and not just in His being alive.

28-29. By this time they were close to the little village, and it was getting dark. "Stay and have supper with us," they urged. And He agreed.

30-31. When they were ready to eat, they asked Him to say the blessing. After He did, He broke the bread in half and gave it to them. As soon as He did that, they recognized Him. Then He disappeared.

32. They looked at each other and said, "It was the Lord! No wonder we were so thrilled when He explained the prophecies to us! He's alive! He's risen!"

33-34. They forgot all about eating and took off for Jerusalem, running and stumbling in the dark. When they got there, they found the disciples and others gathered together. They too were excited, because they had seen Jesus also. They said, "He has

really risen! Peter saw Him and talked to Him!"

35. Then the two followers told the disciples what had happened to them. They told how Jesus had walked with them and talked about the prophecies all the way to Emmaus. Finally they had recognized Him by the way He said the blessing and broke the bread.

36-39. While they were talking, suddenly Jesus stood in their midst and said, "Peace to all of you." Everyone was afraid, because the door was still locked. They thought they were seeing a ghost. Then Jesus said, "Why are you so scared? Look at My hands and feet and feel Me. A ghost doesn't have flesh and bones."

40-43. He showed them the scars in His hands and feet. But while they were happy to see Him, they couldn't believe that it was really Jesus who had come through the locked door. So He said, "Do you have anything to eat?" They gave Him a piece of cooked fish, and He ate it.

44-46. Then He said, "All the prophecies about Me had to be fulfilled." He also helped them to understand why He had to come and die and then rise again on the third day.

47. He told them that the good news about repentance and forgiveness needed to be preached in every country of the world, starting right there in Jerusalem.

48-49. He added, "You have been with Me from the very beginning and have witnessed My death and resurrection. My Father will send the Holy Spirit to help you, just as He promised He would. So stay here until the Holy Spirit comes and energizes you to preach."

50-51. Some days later He took the disciples to the top of the Mount of Olives. When they got there, He

raised His hands and blessed them. As He was doing so, He began to lift off from the earth right up into the sky, until He disappeared out of sight.

52-53. The disciples watched Him go and worshiped Him. After that, they

returned to Jerusalem very happy. They knew that someday Jesus would come back to take His people home. They went to the Temple and talked to everyone about Jesus so that they could be happy too.

John

INTRODUCTION: *The fourth Gospel was written by John, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. It was written after the other three. John wanted everyone to know that Jesus was fully God, even though He was human. He talks a lot about how much God loves us. He also tells about Jesus' power to change people's lives and make them better. He tells us that he watched as Jesus raised from the dead a man who had been buried for three days. John was at the cross and saw Jesus die, and he was the first one to go into Jesus' tomb and find it empty.*

The Word of God

1 Jesus has always been with God. He is the Word of God and is equal with God. There never was a time when He was not with God.

3-4. Everything was made by Him, and without Him nothing was made. He is the source of life. His life here on earth was like a light that brought hope to all of us.

5. His presence was the light of God shining in the darkness of sin. The sinful minds of men tried to put out that light, but did not succeed.

John the Baptist

6-8. When the right time came, God sent a man named John. He came to tell the people about that Light so they would believe that God sent Jesus. John himself wasn't that Light; he only pointed to it.

9-11. Then Jesus came. He came to the very world He had created, but people didn't know who He was. He came to His own people, and they didn't even recognize Him.

12-13. But all those who did accept Him became God's born-again children, not because of their ancestry nor by their own willpower, but because of the power of God.

14. So Jesus, the Word of God, be-

came a man and lived among us. When we met Him we could tell that He had come from God. He was full of grace and truth.

15. John spoke about Him boldly: "This is the Man I've been telling you about. He is more important than I am, because He existed before I was born."

16-17. So because of Jesus, we have all been blessed. God used Moses to give us the Law, but grace and truth came to us through Jesus.

18. No one except Jesus has ever seen God face to face. He was sent to us by God, and came to show us what the Father is like.

John the Baptist

19-21. When some of the priests from Jerusalem came out to the Jordan River to hear John preach, they asked, "Are you the Messiah?" John answered, "I'm not." They asked, "Well, who are you? Are you Elijah come back from heaven?" He said, "No." They asked, "Are you the prophet that Moses said would come?" Again he said, "No."

22-23. Then they asked, "Who are you? We need to take an answer back to Jerusalem." John replied, "I'm just a voice giving a message. As the

prophet Isaiah said: 'Smooth the road for the Lord. The King is coming.'

24-25. The ones asking all these questions were sent by the leaders in Jerusalem. The priests asked John again, "If you're not the Messiah, or Elijah, or that prophet Moses talked about, who then authorized you to preach and baptize people?"

26-27. John said, "I baptize only with water, and there's no power in water. But there is Someone in the crowd who has much more authority than I have. He has power to change people's lives. I'm not worthy even to unfasten His sandals."

28. All these things happened near Bethany on the other side of the Jordan River.

The Lamb of God

29. The next day Jesus pressed through the crowd to be baptized. When John saw Jesus coming, he pointed and said, "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the whole world!"

30. After Jesus was baptized, He left to go to the wilderness to pray. Then John said to the people, "This is the One I've been telling you about. He has much more authority than I have. Even though He is younger than I am, He existed before I was born."

31-32. "I told you that I would point Him out to you. After I baptized Him, I saw the Holy Spirit come down from heaven as a light shaped like a dove and hover over His head."

33. "Before that, I had no idea who the Messiah was, but God had told me that the One over whom the Holy Spirit would hover is the Messiah. He will baptize people with the Holy Spirit."

34. "I'm telling you what I heard and saw. The One I pointed out to you is the Messiah, the Son of God."

The First Disciples

35-36. The day after Jesus came back from the wilderness, John saw Him walking past and said to two of his followers, "Look! There He is! The Lamb of God!"

37-38. When the two of them heard that, they decided to follow Jesus. As they caught up with Him, He turned and said, "Why are you following Me?" They said, "Teacher, where are You staying?"

39-40. Jesus said, "Come and see." So they followed Him to where He was staying and talked with Him that whole day until late in the afternoon. These two were Andrew, Simon's brother, and John.

41. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother. He said, "Simon, we have found the Messiah. Come, I'll take you to Him."

42. So Andrew took his brother to Jesus. When Jesus saw him, He said, "I'm glad you came. From now on you'll be called Peter" (meaning "a little rock").

43-44. The next day Jesus headed north to Galilee. On the way He saw Philip and said, "Come, follow Me." And Philip did. He was from the same town as Peter and Andrew.

45. Then Philip decided to find his friend Nathaniel. When he found him, he said, "We have found the One Moses and the prophets said would come. His name is Jesus. He's from Nazareth. His father is Joseph the carpenter."

46-47. Nathaniel asked, "How can the Messiah come from such a bad place as Nazareth? That's impossible." Philip answered, "Come and see for yourself." So Nathaniel followed Philip. When Jesus met him, He said, "Here's a true disciple. There's nothing dishonest about him."

48-49. Nathaniel replied, "You talk like

You know me." Jesus said, "Before Philip found you, I saw you sitting under a fig tree praying." Nathaniel was shocked. He said, "Teacher, You must be the Messiah, the Son of God. You are the King of Israel."

50-51. Jesus replied, "Because I said I saw you sitting under the fig tree, is that why you believe who I am? Soon you will see much more evidence than that. You will even see heaven open and angels going back and forth from the Father helping Me."

Jesus Attends a Wedding

2 The third day after coming back from the wilderness Jesus attended a wedding. His mother had a part in it, so Jesus and His five disciples were invited.

3. While He was there, the family was about to run out of something to drink. Jesus' mother came to Him and asked, "Son, what are we going to do? Can You help us in some way?"

4-5. Jesus answered, "Mother, I love you. But I can't work a miracle unless My Father tells me to." Mary understood. In faith she turned to the waiters and said, "Whatever my Son asks you to do, do it."

6-7. Nearby were six large water jars that held about thirty gallons each. Jesus knew that the bride and groom would be embarrassed unless something was done soon. He turned to the waiters and said, "Make sure that these jars are full." So they filled them to the top.

8. Then He said, "Dip some out and take a cup of it to the master of ceremonies." When they dipped out what they thought was water, it was freshly squeezed nonalcoholic wine.

9-10. When the master of ceremonies tasted it, he went straight to the groom and said, "At a wedding every-

one serves the best first. When the people are happy, then they serve what's less expensive. But this is the best drink I've ever tasted, and you've saved it till now."

11. This was the first of many miracles that Jesus did during His ministry. When the disciples saw this, they were more convinced than ever that Jesus was the Messiah.

12. After the wedding Jesus went with His mother, His stepbrothers, and His five disciples to Capernaum by the lake to rest a few days.

Jesus Goes to the Temple

13-14. Soon it was Passover time. Jesus, like others, made His way to Jerusalem. When He got there, the Temple court was filled with people buying and selling oxen, sheep, and doves for sacrifices. Others were exchanging money so that they could pay the Temple tax.

15-16. Jesus did not like it. So He picked up some pieces of rope, twisted them into a whip, and told the sellers and money changers to get out. When they refused, He turned over their tables, opened the cages, and said, "Take these things out of here! My Father's house is not a farmer's market!"

17. When the disciples saw this, they thought of what the Bible said about the Messiah: "Zeal for God's house has eaten me up."

18. Then the priests and leaders came and said to Jesus, "Who are You? What right do You have to do this? Show us Your authority by working a miracle for us, as Moses did."

19. Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will rebuild it. That will give you the miracle you're looking for."

20-21. They said, "It took forty-six

years to build this Temple, and You're telling us that You could do it in three days?" Jesus was talking about His body as a temple of God, but they thought He was talking about the actual Temple.

22. After Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples remembered what He had said that day. This increased their faith in the prophecies and what Jesus had taught them.

23-25. All this happened at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and many in Jerusalem believed Him to be the Messiah. But Jesus did not trust everybody. He already knew the hatred in their hearts and didn't have to be told what they were thinking.

Being Born Again

3 There was a Jewish leader named Nicodemus who was highly respected. He wanted to meet Jesus and talk to Him privately. So he went to see Him one night. He said, "Teacher, we know that God has sent You, or You couldn't work all the miracles that You do."

3. Jesus answered, "Miracles alone aren't enough to hang your faith on. You must be born again before you can belong to God's kingdom."

4. Nicodemus asked, "How can a person be born a second time? Can a mother have the same baby twice? That's impossible."

5. Jesus said, "You're right. But I'm not talking about having babies. I'm talking about being born spiritually. Unless people are changed inside by the power of the Holy Spirit and are willing to be baptized, they can't be part of God's kingdom."

6-7. "Being born physically and spiritually are two different things. So don't be surprised when I say that you have to be born again."

8. "How it happens is like the wind that you can feel and hear, but not see. You don't know where it started from or where it will end up. It's the same way with being born again. You can't point and say, 'That's it over there. That's what did it.'"

9-11. Nicodemus shook his head and asked, "How can that be?" Jesus replied, "You're a teacher in Israel and don't understand what I'm talking about? I am telling you what I know and what I've seen."

12-13. "If you can't understand it with an example from earth, how can you understand it with examples from heaven? No one has lived in heaven and then come here except the One who is talking to you."

14. "The new birth is like what happened to people in Moses' time. He put a brass serpent on a pole and held it up for everyone to see. Those who were bitten by poisonous snakes and looked at the pole with faith in God were healed."

15. "The same thing will happen again. I will be put on a cross and held up high for everyone to see. Those who look to Me in faith will be healed from the snakebite of sin."

16-17. "God loved this world so much that He sent His only Son to come here and die. Whoever believes in Him will have eternal life. God did not send His Son to this world to condemn people, but to save them."

18-19. "Those who believe in God's Son are not held guilty. But those who don't believe in Him are already held guilty. What really condemns people is not that they're in darkness, but that they don't accept the light."

20-21. "People don't like to have any of their sins exposed to the light. So they turn away from it. But those who love the light come to God so that they can be changed, and He will do it."

Jesus and John

22-24. After the meeting with Nicodemus, Jesus decided to let His disciples preach and baptize. John was doing the same thing nearby because the water there was deep. But John was later arrested.

25-26. Now, some of John's disciples were arguing with the priests about the importance of baptism. When they heard that Jesus' disciples were also baptizing, they said to John, "The One you said was the Messiah is letting His disciples preach and baptize, and people are going there."

27-28. John answered, "My success is a gift from heaven. I have never claimed to be the Messiah, only a messenger pointing to Him."

29-30. "This is like what takes place at a wedding. The bridegroom's friend makes all the preparations, and when he hears the bridegroom's voice, he's overjoyed. That's how it is with me. Jesus must increase, but I must decrease."

31-32. "He came down from heaven; I didn't. So He's more important than all of us. I can talk only about things here, but He can talk about things up there. Yet few people believe Him, and even fewer accept Him."

33-34. "But those who do accept Him are living witnesses that what God said about Him is true. He speaks God's word with conviction and power because His life is full of the Holy Spirit."

35-36. "The Father loves Him very much, and trusts Him. That's why He has given Him such power. Those who believe in Him and accept Him have eternal life in their hearts, but those who do not accept Him will die in their sins."

Jesus at the Well

4 When the priests heard that Jesus' disciples were baptizing more people than John was, they

became upset. So Jesus decided to leave the area and head north.

4-6. On the way He went through the province of Samaria. Since it was a hot day, He stopped to rest by a well. Years before, this land had belonged to Jacob. That's why the people called it Jacob's well.

7-8. As Jesus sat there, a woman came to get some water. Jesus asked, "Would you give Me a drink?" He was alone because His disciples had gone to town to buy food.

9. The woman answered, "Why would You ask me for a drink? You Jews would rather die than ask a Samaritan for help, especially a woman."

10-12. Jesus responded, "If you knew Me, you would ask Me for a drink of life-giving water." The woman said, "You have no way of getting water, because the well is too deep. Where will You get this life-giving water? Are You greater than Jacob, who gave us this well? This water has lots of meaning for us, because Jacob himself drank from it."

13-15. Jesus replied, "This well has good water, but after you drink it, you'll get thirsty again. If you drink the water I'm talking about, you'll never get thirsty again. It will keep bubbling up inside of you like a fresh mountain spring." She answered, "That's the kind of water I need. Then I won't have to keep coming here to get it."

16-18. Jesus offered, "Go get your husband, and I'll give this water to both of you." She answered, "I don't have a husband." Jesus said, "I know. You've been married five times, and the man you're now living with is not your husband. You're right."

19-20. The woman asked, "How do You know? Are You a prophet? Our ancestors have worshiped God on this mountain for centuries. But Your

people keep saying that Jerusalem is the only place to worship."

21-24. Jesus replied, "The time is coming when you will worship God neither here nor in Jerusalem. People will worship God everywhere, because worship is something spiritual and has to do with the heart."

25-26. The woman answered, "I don't understand everything You say, but I know that someday the Messiah will come and tell us what's right." Jesus stated simply, "I am the Messiah."

27. Just then the disciples came back from town and were shocked to see Jesus talking to a woman alone, especially one from Samaria. But they didn't say anything.

28-30. The woman could tell that she was not welcome. She left her water jar and ran back to town to tell people about Jesus. She said, "Come and see a man who talks like a prophet. He told me everything I've ever done. He must be the Messiah!" The people were curious, and many went out to see Jesus.

31-33. While the woman was gone, the disciples urged, "Master, we know You're hungry; please eat something." Jesus said, "I've been eating while You were gone." They asked each other, "Did someone bring Him food while we were gone?"

34-35. Jesus replied, "The food I'm talking about is the food that comes from seeing this woman open her heart to truth. Don't say that in four months it will be harvesttime. Look at all the people ready to be harvested."

36. "Those who bring others to Me will be filled with joy, and those who come and believe will receive eternal life. In the end the sowers and reapers will rejoice together over all the people who are saved."

37-38. "Some sow and some reap. I'm

sending you to reap what others have sown. You've already tasted the joy of harvesting when you baptized the people that John preached to."

39-40. When the Samaritan woman told the people about Jesus, almost the whole town came out to see Him. They begged Him not to go. So He stayed there teaching them for two more days.

41-42. Because of what He said, many believed He was the Messiah. They said to the woman, "We believe in Him, not because of what you said, but because we listened to Him ourselves. Now we know why you were so excited. There's no doubt that He's the Savior of the world."

Jesus Goes Back Home

43-44. Jesus left Samaria and headed back to Nazareth, even though He knew that He was more welcome elsewhere than in His own hometown.

45. As He headed north into Galilee, people were glad to see Him, because many had seen Him work miracles in Jerusalem during Passover time.

46-47. On the way Jesus decided to stopped at Cana, where He had worked a miracle to help a bride and groom. A man whose son was sick heard that Jesus was in the area. So he went and asked Him to come to his house and heal his son.

48-49. Jesus said to him, "You want Me to come and heal your son, but in your heart you're saying that you'll believe in Me only if I do that." The man answered, "Sir, how could You read my mind? Forgive me. But please heal my son, or he will die!"

50-51. Jesus said, "Go. Your son is healed." The man believed. He was so sure that his son was healed that he delayed getting home until the next morning. As he neared the house, his

servants came running out to tell him that his son was well.

52-53. He asked them when his son started feeling better. They said, "Yesterday, about one o'clock in the afternoon." This was the exact time that the man had talked to Jesus. This fully convinced him that Jesus was the Messiah. When he told his family what had happened, they too believed in Jesus.

54. This was the second major miracle that Jesus did in the little town of Cana since He began His ministry.

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

5 Sometime later Jesus decided to go to Jerusalem for the Passover. Near one of the gates going into the city was a little pool surrounded by a covered walkway.

3-4. Lots of sick people came here to be healed. They waited for the mysterious moving of the quiet water. They believed that every so often an angel disturbed the water, and the first one in would be healed.

5-6. A man who had been paralyzed for many years was there. Jesus asked him, "Would you like to be healed?"

7-8. The man answered, "Sir, I have no one to help me get into the water in time, so everyone gets there before I do." Jesus replied, "I'm here not to help you get into the water, but to heal you. Stand up, take your bedroll, and go home."

9. The man believed Jesus and made an effort to get up. As he did, he was healed! Then he rolled up his mat and turned to thank Jesus, but He had disappeared into the crowd. So the man picked up his bedroll and started home.

10-11. When the priests saw him carrying his mat, they stopped him and said, "You're not to be carrying your bed on Sabbath." The man responded,

"The One who healed me told me to take it and go home."

12-13. They asked, "Who told you to do that? What's His name?" The man didn't know, because Jesus had disappeared into the crowd before he could ask.

14. Later that day Jesus saw the man in the Temple thanking God for healing him. Jesus said, "It's good to see you well. But don't go back to your old ways of living in sin, or you might end up with a worse condition."

15-16. Then the man went to the priests and told them who had healed him. When the priests heard that, they began looking for an excuse to arrest Jesus for telling the man to break the Sabbath.

17-18. Every time they asked Jesus about keeping the Sabbath, He would say, "My Father does good things on the Sabbath, and so do I." This made them more determined to arrest Him, not only for telling the man to break the Sabbath, but for claiming to be God's Son.

Jesus Talks About the Father

19-21. During one of those conversations Jesus said, "I'm doing only what My Father would do. He tells Me what to do, and I do it. Soon He will tell Me to work even greater miracles. You'll be surprised. God can raise the dead, and when He tells me to do it, I will."

22-23. "The Father does not do things by Himself. He does not even judge people, but has asked Me to be the judge. He wants to honor Me, just as I want to honor Him. Those who respect Me respect My Father, and those who don't respect Me don't respect Him, either."

24-26. "Those who listen to what I say and believe that God has sent Me will not be condemned. They will be given

eternal life. The time is coming, and in one sense is already here, when the dead will hear My voice and come back to life. Just as the Father is the source of life, so is the Son.

27-28. "The reason that the Father has asked Me to be the judge is that I am not only the Son of God but also truly human. So don't be surprised when I tell you that the dead will hear My voice and live again.

29. "Those who accept Me and do good will be resurrected and given eternal life. Those who continue to do evil will be judged guilty and will die forever.

30. "If I were just a man, I could judge people only by what I see or by what others tell Me about them. But My Father knows everyone, and He tells Me what people are really like inside. I live to please My Father by doing what He tells Me to do.

31-34. "If I were the only one telling you about Myself, you would have only one witness. But John the Baptist also told you who I am. And what he said about Me came from My Father in heaven. I'm telling you these things so that you can believe and be saved.

35-37. "John was like a shining light, and for a little while you were happy about it. I have an even greater mission than John's. My teachings and miracles are evidence that the Father has sent Me. This should tell you that the Father approves what I'm doing. Why can't you see God in what I say and do?

38-40. "You don't really love God, or you would believe what I'm telling you. You're always studying the Bible and think that by doing that, you have eternal life. But the Bible talks about Me. And you're not willing to come to Me to have eternal life.

41-43. "I don't talk to be honored by people. My honor comes from God. I

know you don't love God. I come in My Father's name, yet you still don't believe Me. If someone came and claimed to speak for God under your direction, you would accept him.

44-47. "You like to be praised by people, but you don't try to please God. I don't have to point out your faults to you; Moses has already done that. If you really believed him, you would believe Me, because he talked about Me. But you don't believe him, so how will you believe Me?"

Jesus Feeds 5,000

6 Then Jesus and His disciples went to Capernaum and crossed Lake Galilee. Crowds followed them because of the miracles Jesus had done in healing the sick.

3-4. He and His disciples went up on a hill and sat down to rest. The Passover feast was soon to be held in Jerusalem, so crowds of people were making their way there.

5. When they saw Jesus sitting on the hill, lots of people stopped to see Him. Jesus looked at them and said to Philip, "These people have come a long way. Soon they'll be hungry. Where can we buy enough food to feed all of them?"

6-7. Jesus said this to test Philip's faith. He already knew how He would feed them. Philip replied, "It would take a lot of money to buy food to feed all these people."

8-9. Andrew suggested, "There's a little boy here who has five small loaves of bread and two little fish. But that's just enough for one person."

10-11. Jesus said, "Go tell the people to sit down." There were about 5,000 men there that day, not counting women and children. Then Jesus took the five small loaves of bread and two little fish. He thanked God for the little boy's

food. Then He gave it to the disciples to give to the people. And they passed it out as fast as they could.

12-13. There was plenty of food, enough for everyone. When the people finished eating, Jesus told the disciples to pick up the leftovers. They did, and filled up twelve large baskets.

14-15. Then the people said to one another, "There's no doubt that Jesus is the prophet that Moses said would come. Let's make Him king!" Jesus knew what they were planning. So He dismissed the people with such firmness that they all obeyed. Then He climbed a nearby hill to pray.

Jesus Walks on Water

16-17. Jesus had told the disciples to go back across the lake, but instead they waited. They were determined to make Him king. Finally, as it began to get dark, they got into their boat and left.

18-19. They hadn't gone far when a fierce storm hit. The waves tossed them around; they thought for sure that their boat would turn over. They rowed with all their might, but they hardly moved. Suddenly they saw someone walking on the water, coming right toward them. They thought it was a ghost, and so they got really scared.

20-21. But it was Jesus. He called out to them, "Don't be afraid! It's Jesus!" What a relief! As soon as Jesus touched the boat, the storm stopped, and He got in. Before they knew it, they had landed on the other shore.

Jesus Talks About Manna

22-24. Some of the people that Jesus had fed decided to stay there for the night. When morning came, they looked for Him, but He was gone. They knew He hadn't left with His dis-

ciples. Some had come in boats, so they decided to go look for Jesus on the other side of the lake.

25-27. When they found Him, they asked, "Teacher, how did You get across the lake?" Jesus answered, "Why were you so set on finding Me? Are you interested in Me or in My miracles? Don't keep thinking about food that spoils, but about food that lasts. Only the Son of God can give you that kind of food."

28-31. They asked, "What do we have to do to get that food?" Jesus answered, "The first thing to do is to believe the Son of God." They then asked, "What sign can You give us so that we can believe that You are the Son of God? Moses gave our ancestors a sign by bringing down bread from heaven."

32-34. Jesus answered, "It wasn't Moses who gave you bread—it was My Father. He also gave your ancestors spiritual food. God has done the same thing now by sending Me down here." They said, "Lord, if You are the Son of God, give us this bread You have, and we'll eat it."

35-36. Jesus said, "I am God's bread from heaven that gives life. Those who accept Me will never go spiritually hungry or thirsty. Yesterday you saw a miracle. Yet you still don't believe that I am the Son of God."

37-38. "The Father calls people to come to Me, and those who come I will never drive away. I came down from heaven, not to do My own thing, but to do whatever My Father wants Me to do."

39-40. "He doesn't want anyone who believes in Me to be lost. And when the end comes, My Father wants Me to resurrect those who believe in Me and give them eternal life."

Jesus Is Questioned

41-42. The priests and leaders in the crowd didn't believe that Jesus had

come down from heaven. They said to each other, "Isn't He Joseph's son? We know His parents, so how can He say that He came down from heaven?"

43-44. Jesus said, "Stop grumbling and complaining about Me. No one can belong to Me unless He responds to God's invitation and believes in Me. If he does, then when the end comes I will resurrect him.

45-46. "That's what the prophet Isaiah had in mind when he said, 'God will teach everyone who wants to learn.' Everyone who listens to the Father will accept Me. I know Him and have seen Him and talked with Him.

47-49. "Anyone who believes in Me has the seeds of eternal life. I am the Bread of Life. The manna your ancestors ate did not give them eternal life. In fact, they never even reached the land of Canaan, because they didn't believe.

50-51. "The food that really matters is the Bread of Life. That is what will give you life eternal. I am that manna. Those who feed on My love have eternal life in their hearts. I will give My life for them, and they will live forever."

52. But the priests and leaders still did not believe Jesus. They said among themselves, "How can people eat Him?"

53-55. Jesus said, "Let Me make it plain. Unless you feed on My love, you cannot have eternal life. But if you believe in Me and eat and drink the spiritual food that I provide, you will be resurrected.

56-58. "If you give yourself to Me, you are part of Me, and I am part of you. Just as I feed on My Father's love for Me, you can feed on My love for you. I am the Bread of Heaven. I'm not talking about the manna your ancestors ate. They ate it and died. The manna I'm talking about gives life."

59. This discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees and priests took place in the church at Capernaum.

Many Followers Leave Jesus

60. Many who claimed to be followers of Jesus said to themselves, "This does not make sense. How can we feed on Him?"

61-62. Jesus knew what they were thinking. So He said, "Are you offended by what I said about coming from heaven? What will you say when you see Me going back to the place I was before?"

63. "As I told you, I'm talking not about physical food, but about spiritual food. When you take My words into your heart, the Holy Spirit will come into your life, and one day you will live forever.

64-65. "But some of you still don't believe Me." He knew that some of them would never believe Him. He also knew that one of His own disciples would betray Him. Then He said, "No one can believe in Me unless he responds to God's call. When he does, My Father will enable him to believe in Me."

66-67. Then people started saying that Jesus was not the Messiah, and many of them left and turned against Him. Jesus said to His disciples, "Are you going to leave Me too?"

68-69. Peter answered, "Lord, where can we go? You are the one who has the words of eternal life. You are the Messiah, the Holy One sent to us by God."

70-71. Jesus replied, "That's why I chose you to be My disciples. But one of you is also listening to Satan." Jesus was referring to Judas, who He knew would betray Him.

Jesus and His Brothers

7 After this, Jesus left the area, because the priests and leaders were making plans to kill Him. He went north to Galilee.

24. When the time came for the Festival

of Shelters, it appeared that Jesus didn't plan to go. His stepbrothers insisted, "You need to go to Jerusalem so that Your followers there can see Your miracles. No one can make the claims that You do and hide. You need to show that You're not afraid."

5. Even His stepbrothers didn't believe in Him.

6-9. Jesus said, "When My Father tells Me to go, I'll go, but not before. You can go if you want. The priests and leaders don't hate you, but they hate Me because My presence convicts them of their sins. Just go ahead. I can't go, at least not now. The timing of what I do is very important." So His brothers left.

Jesus and the Priests

10. A short time later Jesus also left for Jerusalem, but He took a road less traveled. Meanwhile, the priests were looking for Him. They asked, "Where is He? He should be here by now."

11-13. The people were also looking for Him. Some of them said, "He's a good man." Others said, "No, He's not. He's deceiving people." So they were divided. But they didn't talk this way openly, because they feared the priests.

14-15. In the middle of the weeklong festival Jesus came into Jerusalem and went straight to the Temple. The priests were right there listening to Him. They were amazed at what they heard. They asked, "How can He know so much about the Bible when He's never gone to our schools?"

16-17. Jesus overheard them and answered, "The things I teach come from My Father. Anyone can learn these things if he really wants to, as long as he makes God's will first in his life. If he does, he'll know that My teaching is not My own.

18. "If someone keeps talking about

himself and his own accomplishments, he's interested only in his own glory. But I want to honor the One who sent Me. So what I'm saying is true. I'm not deceiving anyone.

19-20. "If you love God so much, why don't you keep His law, as Moses said you should? Why are you thinking about killing Me?" The people answered, "Nobody's trying to kill You. That's all in Your head."

21-22. Jesus replied, "I healed a man on the Sabbath, and you were upset. Yet you even circumcise on the Sabbath because Moses said you should do it eight days after the baby is born. That wasn't his idea. He simply passed on to you what he got from Abraham.

23-24. "If it's so important for you to obey Moses that you circumcise on the Sabbath, why are you upset with Me because I healed a man on the Sabbath? Isn't relieving pain just as important as circumcising? You need to look at the reason for doing things, not just what's being done."

Jesus and the People

25-27. A little later some people said, "Isn't this the man the priests and leaders are planning to kill? Why don't they arrest Him now? Maybe after listening to Him, they believe that He is the Messiah. But how can He be the Messiah, since we know where He's from? When the Messiah comes, no one will know where He came from or who His family is."

28-29. Jesus stopped teaching and said, "Yes, you know Me and where I'm from. But I didn't come here on My own; I came because God sent Me. And what God does is always right. He doesn't deceive anyone. You don't know Him as I do. I've lived with Him. And He is the one who sent Me."

30-31. After He said that, the priests wanted to get their hands on Him, but it wasn't time for God to let that happen. Also, many believed Jesus to be the Messiah. They said, "Could the Messiah do greater miracles than this man? He must be the one we've been looking for."

Jesus and the Jewish Leaders

32. When the Jewish leaders nearby heard this, they decided to send for the Temple guards and have Him arrested. They knew that the longer the people listened to Him the more they would believe Him and not them.

33-34. So while the guards were being called, Jesus said, "I'm going to be here just a little while longer; then I'm going back to where I came from. You'll look for Me but won't be able to find Me, because I'm going where you can't come."

35-36. The leaders said to each other, "Where is He going that we can't find Him? Do you think He's planning to go to another part of the Roman Empire, maybe to Greece or Rome? What does He mean by saying, 'You'll look for Me but won't find Me'?" So they decided not to arrest Him, but to wait and see what He would do.

37-39. On the last day of the festival, Jesus called out, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. If anyone believes in Me, out of his heart will flow spiritual water. This is what the Scripture says." Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in Him. But the time for the Holy Spirit to take over had not yet come, because Jesus had not yet been taken to heaven.

40-42. When the people heard Jesus call for them to come to Him, some said, "We're going. He's certainly the Messiah." Others said, "The Messiah

won't come from Nazareth. The Bible says that He'll come from Bethlehem, where David came from."

43. So there was confusion over who Jesus was. Then the Jewish leaders decided to have the guards arrest Him.

44-46. When the guards came back without Jesus, the leaders asked, "Where is He? Why didn't you bring Him?" The officer said, "We've never heard a man speak like this before. If we had tried to arrest Him, we would have had a riot on our hands."

47-49. The priests and leaders were very upset with the guards. They said, "Did He deceive you, too? Do any of us believe that He's the Messiah? The people are ignorant. They don't know the Bible as we do. Poor people are under God's curse. So don't depend on what they think."

50-51. Then Nicodemus, who some time before had visited with Jesus by night, spoke up: "According to the law," he said, "a person has a right to defend himself. We don't arrest anyone until we question him and find out what he has done."

52-53. The rest of the priests and leaders said, "Don't tell us that you too are deceived! The Bible doesn't say that the Messiah will come from Nazareth." Then they closed the meeting and went home.

The Woman Caught Sinning

8 Jesus left the Temple and went to the Mount of Olives to be alone and to pray. The next morning He returned to the Temple. Soon a large crowd gathered around Him to listen to what He had to say.

3-5. Then the priests brought to Jesus a woman who had been caught in an act of sin. They said, "Teacher, this woman was sleeping with a man who was not her husband. What should

we do with her? Moses said that such a woman should be executed. What do You say?"

6-7. They did this to trap Him. But Jesus said nothing. He just bent down and with His finger began writing on the ground. They kept pushing for an answer. So He stood up and said, "Those of you who have never sinned may throw the first stone."

8-9. Then He bent down and started writing again. The priests looked to see what He was writing. Then one by one they left, the older ones first and then the others.

10-11. Jesus said to the woman, "It looks as though all those who accused you are gone." She looked around and said, "That's true." Jesus said, "And I'm not here to condemn you. I forgive you for what you have done. But don't do it again."

Jesus, the Light of the World

12. Jesus turned to the people who had been watching all this and said, "I am the Light of the world. Those who follow Me will never live in darkness, but can walk into the future with confidence."

13-14. Some of the priests who had joined the crowd said, "You keep telling us who You are, but You're not telling the truth." Jesus said, "I am telling you the truth. I know where I came from. But you don't really want to know the truth, so you can't understand what I'm saying."

15-16. "You judge by the way that things look. I don't. When I judge, I know that My decision is right, because I don't make it on My own. My Father helps Me. And the two of Us are like one."

17-19. "The Bible says that judges should make decisions based on two or three witnesses. I'm telling you

who I am, and My Father is speaking through Me, so you have your two witnesses." They demanded, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "You don't even recognize Me; how do you expect to recognize My Father?"

20. As the discussion continued, the priests felt like having the Temple guards arrest Him. But they couldn't, because the right time for it to happen had not yet come.

21. Later that day Jesus talked to the priests again. "Soon I'll leave you," He said. "You'll look for Me, but you won't be able to find Me. And you can't come to where I'm going. You'll have to stay here and die in your sins."

22-24. They said to each other, "Do you think He's planning to kill Himself? Why would He say, 'Where I'm going you can't come?'" Jesus overheard it and said, "You don't understand spiritual things. That's why you can't understand what I'm saying. I look beyond this present world; you don't. That's why I said that you will die in your sins unless you believe in Me."

25-27. They asked, "Who are You, anyway?" Jesus answered, "I have told you. There are many other things I could tell you. I'm just telling you what My Father has told Me. And what He says about Me is true." They still didn't understand that Jesus was talking about His heavenly Father.

Freedom in Jesus

28-29. Jesus said, "After you have Me lifted up, then you'll know who I am and that I came here from God. I do nothing on My own. I tell you only what My Father has told Me. When He sent Me, He didn't leave Me here alone. I obey Him because I love Him."

30-32. Many who were listening believed what Jesus said about Himself. He then said, "If you continue to be-

lieve what I'm saying, then you are My disciples. Soon you'll know even more truth about Me, and this truth will make you free."

33. Some in the crowd said, "We are a free people. We're the descendants of Abraham. Our hearts have never been enslaved by anyone. So what do you mean, 'The truth will make us free'?"

34-36. Jesus replied, "I'm talking about being free from slavery to sin. A slave might feel he's free when he's treated like a son, but he's not really free. The children of the owner are the ones who are really free. I'm the Son of My Father. If you become His children, you'll be free too."

37-38. "I know that you are descendants of Abraham. But some of you are plotting My death. So how can you say that you belong to Abraham? I'm telling you what My Father has told Me. You have a different father and do what he tells you."

39-40. They said, "Abraham is our father." Jesus answered, "If you were true children of Abraham, you would act like him. You're planning to arrest Me and kill Me. That's not what Abraham would do. Your spirit comes from another father."

41. They said, "You don't even know who Your father is, because Your mother was pregnant before she got married. How then can You say You belong to God? He's our Father, not Yours."

42-43. Jesus said, "If God were Your Father, you would listen to Me, because He is the one who sent Me. I came here, not on My own authority, but on His. Why can't you understand what I'm saying? It's because you really don't want to."

44. "Your spirit comes from the devil. He's had murder in his heart from the beginning. He was against the truth about Me, and still is."

There's no truth in him. He's a liar and the father of lying.

45-47. "I'm telling you the truth, but you don't believe Me. Why not? Why do you think I'm lying? If God were your Father, you would understand what He's saying. The reason you don't is that you don't really know Him or love Him."

48. The priests and leaders answered, "What You just said about us proves that You're a deceiver and a liar. You're as crafty as those foreign Samaritans. You're the one being influenced by the devil. We're not."

49-51. Jesus responded, "I am not being influenced by the devil. I love My Father, and He loves Me. You don't even give Me the respect that you give to strangers. I'm not here to defend Myself. My Father will do that. Whoever believes Me and holds on to what I say will never die."

52-53. Those who hated Jesus said, "Now we know that You're controlled by the devil. Abraham believed God and he died, didn't he? The prophets died. How can You say that anyone who believes in You will never die? Are You more powerful than Abraham and the prophets? They couldn't give life to others. How do You think You can?"

54-56. Jesus answered, "I am not here to honor Myself. My Father, the God you claim as yours, will do that. You don't really know Him. But I do. If I said I didn't know Him, I would be lying. But I know Him and obey Him. Abraham looked forward to My coming. In vision he saw Me and was glad."

57-58. The priests and leaders said, "You're not even fifty years old. How can You say that Abraham saw You and was glad?" Jesus said, "Because I existed before Abraham was even born."

59. Then they went to get stones to stone Him to death for what He had

said. By the time they returned, Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. He passed right by them and left the Temple.

Jesus Heals a Blind Man

9 When Jesus and His disciples were leaving Jerusalem, they saw a man everyone knew had been born blind. They said to Jesus, "Master, was this man born blind because of his parents' sins?"

3-5. Jesus answered, "No. But God can use the man's misfortune to show His love and power. That's the reason I came. I'm the Light of the world and must work for God while I'm here, because the night is coming when no one can work."

6-7. Then He asked the disciples to bring the blind man to Him. Jesus spit on the ground, made a little mud, and put it on the man's eyelids. Then He told him to go to the nearby pool and wash it off. The man did. And when he opened his eyes, he could see. And he ran home praising God.

8-9. His neighbors said, "Is this the same man who was born blind? Isn't he the one who always sat by the road begging?" Others answered, "Yes, that's the one." Still others said, "No, it just looks like him." So he said, "I am the man."

10-12. They asked him what had happened. He answered, "A man named Jesus put a little mud on my eyelids and told me to go to the pool and wash it off. When I did, I could see!" They asked, "Where is this man? The man replied, 'I don't know.'"

13-15. Because he was healed on the Sabbath, they took him to the priests. The priests asked him what had happened. He told them the same thing he had told his neighbors.

16. Some of the priests said, "Who-

ever did this is not working for God, because He did it on the Sabbath." But others said, "If He broke the Sabbath, He sinned. But how can a sinner work a miracle like this?" So they could not agree on it.

17. Then the priests said to the man, "Tell us more about the One who opened your eyes." The man replied, "He's a prophet."

18-19. So the priests called his parents, because they refused to believe that he had been born blind. Then they questioned them, "Is this your son? Was he born blind? What happened that he can now see?"

20-23. The parents answered, "Yes, this is our son who was born blind. We don't know what happened to make him see. He's old enough; ask him." The parents answered this way because if they said Jesus was a prophet, they would be put out of the synagogue. So they said, "Ask him."

24-25. The priests then questioned the man, "Tell us again exactly what happened and give God the glory, not the One who healed you, because He's a sinner." The man said, "Whether or not He's a sinner, I don't know. But there is one thing I know: once I was blind, and now I can see."

26-27. The priests said, "Tell us again what happened. What did He actually do to help you see?" The man answered, "I've already told you. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to be His disciples?"

28-29. They replied, "Maybe you want to be His disciple, but we don't. We follow Moses because we know God worked through him. But we know very little about this man. We don't even know who His real father is."

30. The man said, "That's strange. You say that you don't know much about this man and have no evidence

that God is working through Him, yet I'm standing here in front of you. What more evidence do you need?

31-33. "Only God can heal a man born blind. And He doesn't give that kind of power to sinners. Never has there been a case of an ordinary man healing someone born blind. If God had not given Him the power to do it, He could not have done it. Is that so hard to understand?"

34. The priests got upset and retorted, "You were born blind because your parents were living in sin. Are you trying to teach us?" Then they sent him home.

35-37. Jesus heard about this, so He looked for the man until He found him. He asked, "Do you believe that the One who healed you is the Son of God?" The man replied, "Yes, I do! Where is He?" Jesus answered, "You're looking at Him."

38-39. The man said, "Yes, You do sound like Him. I believe You." Then he fell on his knees and worshiped Him. Jesus turned to those nearby and remarked, "What I do makes people decide for Me or against Me. Those who are blind see, and those who see become blind."

40-41. When the priests standing nearby heard this, they asked, "Are you saying that we're blind?" Jesus answered, "If you were blind to what the Bible says and didn't know Me, you would not be guilty. But when you claim to know God and reject Me, you're sinning."

Jesus, the Good Shepherd

10 Jesus said, "If a man climbs into the sheep pen without using the gate, everyone knows that he's a thief. But if he uses the gate, people know that he's the shepherd.

3-5. The guard will open the gate for

him. The sheep know the shepherd's voice as he calls them by name. They follow Him to the pasture. They won't listen to a stranger, because they know that he's not the shepherd."

6-8. Jesus could tell that the people and priests didn't understand what He was talking about. So He said, "I am the door into God's sheep pen. Others came claiming to be the Messiah, but they were thieves and robbers, and the sheep didn't listen to them.

9-10. "I am the door. If anyone comes into God's sheep pen through Me, he'll be safe and will find plenty to eat. Thieves and robbers are interested, not in feeding the sheep, but in killing and eating them. I have come to give them a new, abundant life.

11-13. "I am the good shepherd and am ready to give My life for the sheep. A hired man has no real interest in the sheep. When he sees wolves coming, he leaves the flock and runs. Then the wolves kill some of the sheep and scatter the rest. The man runs because he's only a hired man.

14-16. "I am the good shepherd. I know My sheep, and they know Me. The Father knows that I'm willing to give My life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not part of this flock. I must care for them, too. They will listen to My voice and follow Me. Then there will be one flock and one Shepherd.

17-18. "This is why My Father loves Me, because I'm willing to die for the sheep. But I will live again. Those who want to kill Me couldn't do it if I didn't let them. I will lay down My life voluntarily. But I'll take it back again. I can do that, because that's what My Father asked Me to do."

19-21. After Jesus said that He was the door and also the shepherd, those who heard Him were divided. Some said, "He's possessed by the devil.

Why should we even listen to Him?" Others replied, "He doesn't talk as though He's devil-possessed. If He were, how could He have healed someone born blind?"

22-24. The next time Jesus talked about sheep was in Jerusalem at the Festival of Dedication. It was winter. As Jesus walked along the Temple porch, the priests stopped Him and said, "Don't keep us wondering. If You're the Messiah, say so."

25-27. Jesus said, "I have already told you, but you don't believe Me. The works that I do in My Father's name should tell you who I am. But you don't believe Me, because you're not part of My sheep. My sheep know My voice and follow Me."

28-30. "I will give My sheep eternal life, and no one can steal them from Me. The Father put them in My care. And no one can steal from God. So the sheep are safe. My Father and I work together."

31-32. Then the priests and leaders went to get stones to kill Jesus, as they had done once before. When they returned, Jesus looked at them and said, "I have done nothing but good for the people. I did what My Father told Me. For which of these good works will you stone Me?"

33. They said, "We're going to stone You, not for the good You have done, but because You claim to be equal with God. But we know that You're just human, as we are."

34-36. Jesus answered, "Doesn't the Bible say that we're all the sons of God? And God doesn't lie. So how can you kill Me for saying that I'm the Son of God?"

37-38. "If I'm not doing the Father's work, then you don't have to believe in Me. But at least admit that what I do comes from God. If you did that

much, you would soon see that the Father is in Me and I am in the Father, which makes us one."

39. What Jesus said didn't do a bit of good. They still hated Him. They rushed to grab Him and drag Him out of the Temple to stone Him. But He slipped through the crowd and was gone.

40. Later that day He left Jerusalem to go to the Jordan River, where John the Baptist had preached. A large crowd followed Him, and He stayed there for some time.

41-42. The people said to Jesus, "John never worked miracles, as You do. But everything he said about You is true." Then many believed in Jesus and accepted Him as the Messiah.

The Death of Lazarus

11 Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, became very sick. Mary was the one who had sprinkled perfume on Jesus' head and feet and wiped His feet with her long hair.

3-4. The sisters feared that Lazarus would die. So they sent word to Jesus to come and heal him. Jesus sent this message back: "Don't worry about Lazarus. His sickness will bring glory to God."

5-7. Jesus loved Lazarus and his two sisters. It hurt Him to see them suffer. Yet He didn't go for two days. On the third day He said to His disciples, "Let's go and see Lazarus."

8. They said, "Master, they live near Jerusalem. When You were there before, the priests tried to kill You. Are you sure You want to go back there?"

9-11. Jesus answered, "There are twelve hours of daylight during which a man can work. But when night comes, he has to stop. It's the same with Me. I don't have much time left."

My friend Lazarus is sleeping. I need to go and wake him up."

12-15. The disciples said, "If he's sleeping, that means he's getting better." Jesus replied, "I'm not talking about ordinary sleep. Lazarus is dead. For your sakes I'm glad I wasn't there. You'll see what I mean. Come, let's go."

16. Thomas whispered to the others, "Let's go. We'll probably all be killed."

17-19. So they headed for Bethany. But by the time they got there, Lazarus had been dead for four days and was already buried. Since Bethany wasn't very far from Jerusalem, some of the Jewish leaders had gone there to comfort the family.

20. Someone whispered to Martha that Jesus was coming into town. So, without Mary knowing it, she slipped out of the house and went to meet Him.

21-22. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask God to do, He will do it."

23-26. Jesus answered, "Your brother will live again." Martha replied, "I know, because he'll be resurrected in the last days." Jesus said, "I am the Resurrection. Anyone who believes in Me, even though he dies, will live again. Do you believe that?"

27-30. Martha said, "Lord, I believe that You are the Messiah." Then she ran back to get her sister, Mary. She urged, "Come, the Master is here and wants to see you, too." Quietly they slipped out of the house to see Jesus.

31. When the relatives and friends saw the sisters leave, they thought that they were going to the grave site, and decided to go too.

32-33. But the sisters had gone to where Jesus was. When Mary saw Him, she fell on her knees and said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would

not have died." When Jesus saw her crying, He sympathized with her pain.

34-35. He asked, "Where is he buried?" They said, "Come, we'll show You." Then Jesus started crying too.

36-37. Some of the people said, "Look, Jesus is crying. He must have really loved Lazarus." Others said, "If He loved him so much, why didn't He come and heal him? He healed a man born blind. He certainly could have healed Lazarus."

38-39. Jesus was really hurt over all this. When He came to the little cave where Lazarus was buried, He saw that the opening was closed with a big stone. He told those nearby, "Roll away the stone." Martha exclaimed, "Oh, no, Lord! He's been dead for four days, and the smell will be terrible."

40. Jesus said, "Didn't I tell you that if you had faith in Me, you would see the power of God?"

41-42. So they rolled away the stone. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Dear Father, thank You for hearing My prayer. I know You always hear Me. But I'm saying it out loud so that people will know that you sent Me and that I'm Your Son."

43-44. Then He looked at the entrance to the cave and commanded with a loud voice, "Lazarus! Come out!" For a moment it was very still. Suddenly the one who had been dead stood at the entrance of the cave with his body still wrapped in burial clothes. Jesus said, "Go, and unwrap him."

The Plan to Kill Jesus

45-46. Many who saw this, including some of the priests and leaders, then believed that Jesus truly was the Messiah. But some rushed back to Jerusalem to tell the other priests and leaders what had happened.

47-48. So the chief priests called a

meeting and said, "What are we going to do? This man Jesus is performing some real miracles. If we don't stop Him, the whole country will be following Him, and the Romans will take away the little freedom we do have."

49-50. Then Caiaphas, the high priest, said, "You're so afraid of what will happen that you're not thinking. Isn't it better for one man to die than to lose the whole country?"

51-52. Caiaphas didn't realize that what he had just said was prophetic. Jesus would have to die to save the nation. But He would save a nation of people from all over the world.

53-54. After this, the priests and leaders made plans to have Jesus executed. So He decided not to make any more public appearances. He left the area with His disciples and went to a little village near the desert and stayed there.

55. When the time for the Passover came, people from all over began going to Jerusalem. They wanted to get there early to be ready when the celebration began.

56-57. They were curious about Jesus, so they went to the Temple to look for Him. They said to each other, "Where is He? Do you think He's too afraid to come?" They said this because the priests and leaders had announced that if anyone saw Jesus, they should let them know immediately so they could arrest Him.

Mary Anoints Jesus

12 Six days before the Passover, Jesus decided to go to Bethany to see Lazarus and his sisters. While there, Simon, one of the leaders whom Jesus had healed, invited Him to his house for dinner. Lazarus was to be the honored guest. Martha was in charge of the food.

3. As Mary thought about Jesus' dying, she wanted to honor Him. So she bought some very expensive perfume. While He was eating, she sprinkled it on His head and feet. As her tears fell on His feet, she wiped them with her long hair. Soon the whole house was filled with the fragrance of perfume.

4-6. Judas was disgusted. "This is very expensive perfume," he said. "It must have cost a whole year's wages. What a waste! We could have sold it and given the money to feed the poor." He said this because he was the disciples' treasurer, but he had used some of the money for himself.

7-8. Jesus didn't want to correct Judas him publicly, so He quietly said, "Let her finish what she's doing. She's preparing My body for burial. You'll always have a chance to feed the poor. But I won't be with you that much longer."

The Plan to Kill Lazarus

9-11. People heard that Lazarus was at Simon's house. So they came, hoping to see Jesus and the man whom He had raised from the dead. The chief priests had decided to arrest and kill not only Jesus but Lazarus also. It was because of him that more and more people were accepting Jesus as the Messiah.

Jesus Rides a Donkey

12-13. The next day people heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem for the Passover. So they cut off palm branches and went to meet Him. They shouted, "Praise God! Blessings on the One whom God has sent! Blessings on the King of Israel!"

14-15. Jesus sent two disciples to get a young donkey. Then He got on it and rode into Jerusalem. This was what Zechariah the prophet had predicted

when he said, "Do not be afraid, but rejoice. Your King is coming, riding on a donkey and bringing peace."

16. The disciples didn't understand the full meaning of this text until later, after Jesus had gone back to heaven. Then they understood that everything that happened that week was according to prophecy.

17-18. Those who had seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead had told everyone about it. So when people heard that Jesus and Lazarus were coming to Jerusalem, almost the whole city went out to see them.

19. The priests and leaders said, "The warnings we gave people about Jesus did absolutely no good. It looks as though the whole world is running after Him."

20-22. That day a lot of visitors were in Jerusalem. Some had come all the way from Greece. After Jesus went into the Temple, these men said to Philip, "We want to see Jesus." Philip told Andrew, and they both went and asked Jesus if He wanted to see these men.

23. So Jesus went to the section of the Temple set aside for people who were not Jewish. He talked with the men; then He came back and said to His disciples, "The time has come for My mission to end."

24. "Unless a kernel of wheat is buried, it can produce nothing. But if it's put in the ground and dies, it will produce many kernels. And in turn they will produce a great harvest. So it is with Me."

25-26. "If a person lives only for himself, he will lose eternal life. But if he dies to selfishness and lives to help others, he'll receive eternal life. Those who love Me and obey Me will be in heaven with Me. And My Father will honor them."

Jesus and the Father

27. Jesus continued, "Right now I'm concerned about what will soon happen to Me. But what can I say? Should I ask My Father to come and rescue Me? I can't do that, because I have come to do His will."

28. Jesus prayed, "Father, honor Your name." Then a voice from heaven said, "I have done so before, and I will do so again."

29. People nearby heard something, but didn't know what it was. Some said, "That sounded like thunder." Others said, "It sounded like the voice of an angel."

30-31. Jesus replied, "The voice you heard was for your sake, not Mine, so that you would know that God sent Me. Soon the prince of this world will be judged, and those who see what he's really like will turn against him."

32-33. "When I'm lifted up, I will draw people from all over the world to Me." By this Jesus meant that He would be crucified, which would cause many people to hear about Him and to love Him.

34. Some said, "The Bible says that when the Messiah comes, He'll be with us forever. If you're the Messiah, how can You say that You'll be crucified?"

35-36. Jesus said, "The light is with you just a few days longer. So follow the light, or you will be in the dark and won't know where you're going. Walk in that light, and you'll be the children of God." Then Jesus and His disciples mingled with the people and were soon hidden in the crowd.

37-38. Even though Jesus had worked lots of miracles, many still didn't believe that He was the Messiah. This was what the prophet Isaiah had predicted when he said, "Where are those who believe God? Where are those who have seen His mighty works?"

39-41. "God lets people close their

eyes and hearts because they don't really want to see or understand. That's why they're not changed and their hearts are not healed." These are just some of the things that Isaiah said when he saw in vision what would happen when Jesus would come.

42-43. But many did believe that Jesus was the Messiah, including many priests and leaders. But they were afraid to say so because of the high priest who would put them out of the priesthood and take their leadership away. They loved their positions more than they loved God.

44-46. Then Jesus spoke with a loud voice so that everyone in the Temple could hear: "Those who believe in Me believe in God. Those who see Me see the One who sent Me. I have come to give people light, and those who follow the light will be safely guided through the darkness of this world.

47-48. "If anyone hears what I'm saying but doesn't understand, I will not condemn him. I came not to condemn people, but to save them. Those who reject Me are condemning themselves. What I've said will stand against them in the last days.

49-50. "I'm telling you this not on My own authority, but on that of My Father, who told Me what I should tell you. He wants Me to offer you eternal life. Whatever I tell you is what He told Me to say."

The Last Supper

13 It was time for the Passover feast. Jesus knew that He would soon leave this world and go back to the Father. He had loved His people in the world and would love them to the very end.

2. During the Passover meal Judas was prompted by the devil to go betray Jesus to the priests.

3. Jesus knew that He was the Son of God and that His Father had given Him power over all things. He also knew that He would be crucified and would then return home to His Father.

4-5. Just before the evening meal, Jesus stood up and took off His warm robe. He picked up a towel and a basin of water and began washing the disciples' feet, as was the custom of servants.

6-7. When Jesus came to wash Peter's feet, Peter protested: "Lord, You're the Son of God. I am not going to let You wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Right now you don't understand what it means to be a disciple. But you will."

8-9. Peter said, "I won't let You lower Yourself to wash my feet." Jesus replied, "If you don't let Me wash your feet, you can't be My disciple." Peter answered, "If that's the case, then wash me all over."

10-11. Jesus said, "A person who's had a bath needs only to rinse the dust that he picked up along the road off his feet. All of you have a good heart, except one." Jesus said this because He knew what Judas was planning to do.

12-15. After Jesus finished washing the disciples' feet, He put His outer robe back on, sat down, and said, "Let Me tell you why I washed your feet. You call Me Lord, and that's right. What you saw Me do, you should be willing to do. I've given you an example of what it means to serve others.

16-17. "A disciple is not above doing what he sees his master do. One who is sent on a mission is not greater than the one who sent him. If you understand this and do it, you'll always be happy inside.

18-19. "I picked you to be My disciples because in your hearts you are good men. Only one of you I didn't choose. As David predicted: 'The one who ate with me betrayed me.' I'm

telling you this now, so that when it happens it will strengthen your faith.

20. "I tell you the truth. Whoever accepts those I send to speak for Me accepts Me. And those who accept Me accept the One who sent Me."

Jesus Talks About His Death

21. Jesus seemed to be very troubled, and said, "Before the evening is over, one of you will betray Me."

22-25. The disciples wondered what Jesus was talking about. Peter motioned to John, who was sitting next to Jesus, to ask Him whom He was talking about. John leaned closer to Jesus and asked, "Lord, who is it?"

26. Jesus said, "I'll dip a piece of bread in the sauce, and the one I give it to is the one who will turn against Me." Then He gave the piece of bread to Judas.

27. As soon as Judas took the bread, the devil took hold of him. Jesus said quietly, "What you feel you have to do, do quickly."

28-30. The others didn't know why Jesus told Judas to go. They thought He was sending him to buy something still needed for the Passover, or to give an offering to the poor, since he handled the money. So Judas got up and went outside. It was dark.

31-32. Then Jesus said to His disciples, "The time has come for God to be glorified in His Son and to bring honor to His name. When that happens, the Son will also be glorified and honored."

33-35. "I won't be with you much longer. Where I'm going, you can't follow. You know how much I love you; love each other the same way. That's how people will know that you're My disciples."

36-38. Peter asked, "Lord, where are

You going?" Jesus answered, "You can't follow Me now, but you will later." Peter asked, "Why can't I go with You now? I'll go anywhere You do. I'll even die for You." Jesus replied, "Die for Me? Before the rooster crows in the morning, you will deny Me three times."

Jesus Promises to Come Again

14 "Don't be worried. You believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house there's room for all who want to come. If that weren't so, I would have told you. I'm going back to get things ready for you. I promise to come again and take you home, so that you can be where I am."

4-5. "You know where I'm going and how to get there." Thomas confessed, "Lord, we have to be honest. We don't know where You're going or how to get there."

6-7. Jesus replied, "I'm the way to get there. No one can come to the Father except through Me. If you know Me, you know the Father. So you can say that you've seen the Father, because you've seen Me."

8-9. Philip spoke up: "Lord, just give us one little glimpse of the Father before You go, and we'll be satisfied." Jesus said, "I've been with you all this time and you still want to see the Father? If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father."

10-11. "Don't you believe that the Father is in Me and that I'm in the Father? It's true. I never did anything on My own. Everything I did, the Father told Me to do. If it's hard for you to believe this, at least base your faith on what you've seen Me do."

12. "If you really believe what I'm telling you, you'll end up doing the same things I have done. In fact, you'll do them in many more places than I

have, because now I have to go back to the Father.

13-14. "Whatever you ask Me to do for you, I will do it, as long as you ask for it in My name and with the same spirit that I have. Then you'll bring glory to the Father, as I have. So ask for whatever you need to complete your mission, and I'll give it to you.

15-16. "If you love Me, you'll do what I ask you to do. When I get back home, I'll ask the Father to send the Holy Spirit to take My place. He will help you carry on My mission.

17-18. "The world won't receive Him, but you will, and He'll work through you. I know this because I've seen Him working in your lives. He'll stay with you to the very end. So you won't be alone. The Holy Spirit and I work together. So if He's here, I'm here through Him.

19. "In just a few more hours I'll be leaving, and people will wonder where I've gone. But you will know. One day we'll be together again, and you will live forever.

20. "When the Holy Spirit comes, He'll help you understand these things better. Then you'll know what it means for Me to be one with the Father, because you'll also be one with Us.

21. "Those who know My commandments and keep them because they love Me are truly My disciples. The Father loves them in a very special way. We will help them to know us even better."

22-24. Thaddaeus, also called Judas (not the Judas who betrayed Jesus), asked, "Lord, how can You reveal Yourself to us and not to other people?" Jesus replied, "If someone loves Me and obeys, My Father and I will come and make his heart Our home. If someone does not love and obey, he's rejecting not just Me, but My Father also.

25-26. "I want to make sure that you understand what I'm saying. The Father will send the Holy Spirit to take My place. He will help you remember what I told you, and will teach you even more besides.

27. "I want you to have the same peace that I have. I'm not talking about the kind of peace that the world gives, but peace with God. You don't have to be afraid of God. He loves you.

28-29. "I've told you that I must leave, but I am coming back. If you love Me, you will be glad that I can go back to My Father. I'm telling you all this ahead of time so that when it happens, your faith in Me will be even stronger.

30. "After tonight I won't be talking with you for a while. The devil, who thinks he owns everyone in this world, has no power over Me, because there's nothing in Me that responds to him.

31. "Everyone needs to know that I love the Father. That's why I do everything He tells Me to do. They also need to know that the Father loves them. Well, it's time to go. Let's be on our way."

Jesus Is the Vine

15 As they made their way to the Mount of Olives, Jesus continued: "I am like a grapevine in God's vineyard, and you are the branches. If there's a branch that doesn't bear fruit, God will have to cut it off. Those branches that do bear fruit, God keeps trimming so that they can produce more fruit.

3-4. "When you accepted Me, your lives began to change for the better. So stay close to Me. A branch can't bear fruit unless it's attached to the vine.

5-6. "It's the same with you. If you're attached to Me, you'll bear fruit. Without Me you can do nothing. If you let go of Me, you'll be like a branch that's been

cut off from the vine. It dies and will be thrown on a brush pile and burned.

7-8. "But if you stay connected to Me, then you can ask God to help you produce the kind of fruit you should, and He will. The more fruit you produce, the more you will honor God, and the more people will know that you are My disciples.

Jesus Is Our Friend

9-11. "I love you just as much as the Father loves you. If you obey Me, you'll stay connected to Me, just as I obey the Father and stay connected to Him. I'm telling you this because I love you and want you to be as happy as I am.

12-14. "Remember one thing: Love each other as I have loved you. There's no greater way to show that you love your friends than by giving your life for them. You're My friends if you love Me and do what I ask you to do.

15. "I have never treated you like servants. Servants aren't told everything their master is doing. But you're My friends. So I've told you everything My Father told Me to tell you.

16-17. "You didn't choose Me to be your friend. But I was your friend before you even knew Me. I chose you to be My disciples and to produce fruit that will last. When you ask God to help you do it, He will. So be friends and love one another.

Sometimes There Are Troubles

18-19. "If people hate you, remember that they hated Me, also. They love those who act the way they do. But because you're different, they won't always like you.

20-21. "Servants are not treated better than their masters. So don't expect them to treat you better than they've treated Me. However, some will believe in Me and keep My words, and some

will do the same for you. Others will mistreat you because you're My friend. But they're not God's friends.

22-23. "If I had not pointed out their sins, they would have been happy with Me. But now they can't do what they would like without feeling guilty. So they don't like Me and My Father.

24-25. "All the miracles I did opened their eyes. They know that what I told them is true. That's why they don't like Me and My Father. David knew that this would happen to Me when he said, 'They hate me for no reason.'

26-27. "When the Father sends the Holy Spirit, He will tell the people more about Me. And you will too, because you've been with Me from the beginning of My ministry.

The Holy Spirit

16 "I'm telling you these things ahead of time so that you won't lose heart and give up. You will be forced to leave your churches, and some people will think that they're doing God a favor by killing you.

3-4. "They'll do this because they don't really know Me or My Father. They don't realize that We're for them, not against them. I'm telling you these things ahead of time so that you won't be surprised. I didn't tell you all this before, because I was still with you.

5-6. "Now I must return to My Father. But not one of you has asked where I'm going or what I'll be doing. Is it because you're sad about My leaving?

7. "I tell you, it's better for Me to go back to My Father, because if I don't, the Holy Spirit can't come to take My place. So it's to everyone's advantage that I go and have Him come to be with you.

8-11. "When He comes, He will convict people of sin and offer them righteousness. He will tell them not to be

afraid of the judgment, because Satan has been defeated.

12-13. "There are a lot of other things that I could tell you, but you're not ready for them. When the Holy Spirit comes, He'll teach you these things and guide you into all truth. He won't talk about Himself, but will say only what I want Him to, including telling you of things still to come.

14-15. "He will bring glory to Me, because He'll talk to you about Me. Everything that the Father has belongs to Me, too. That's why I said that the Holy Spirit will take what is Mine and share it with you.

16. "My time is really getting close now. Soon I'll have to leave. You'll see Me again for a little while, but then I'll have to go home to My Father."

17-18. The disciples said to each other, "What does He mean by 'a little while and then He'll go home'? We don't understand what He's talking about."

19-20. Jesus knew what was bothering them, so He asked, "Do you want to know what I meant? A few hours from now you'll be shocked and hurt by what you see. But later you'll rejoice.

21. "It'll be like a mother who is ready to have a baby. Just before the baby comes, there is a lot of pain, but once the baby arrives, she's happy.

22. "That's something like what will happen to you. You will really be sad when I die, but when you see Me again, you'll be happier than you've ever been. And no one will take away your joy.

23-24. "At that time you won't need to ask Me for things. The truth is that you can go directly to the Father and ask Him, and He'll give you what's best. Until now you haven't done this. Do it, and you'll be full of joy.

25-26. "I know that I'm not answering your questions as I could, but the

time will come when I'll talk to you more plainly about the Father. Then you'll ask Him for things you need. That's what I've been doing for you.

27-28. "The Father loves you. He's especially happy because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from Him. I came here from the Father, and when I leave, I'll go back to Him."

29-30. The disciples said, "Now we're beginning to understand a little better. We have heard You answer all kinds of questions. Yet You never needed anyone to help You with the answer. We believe that You came to us from the Father."

31-32. Jesus said, "Are you sure? A few hours from now you'll leave Me, and I'll be alone. But, of course, I won't really be alone, because My Father is with Me.

33. "I'm telling you this so that you may have peace in your heart and never have to feel alone. You'll have troubles, but take courage. I have overcome the evil one."

Jesus Prays for His Disciples

17 Then Jesus stopped, looked up to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come. Honor Your Son so that I can honor You.

2-3. "You have given Me authority over the whole world so that I can give eternal life to all those who love You. Eternal life means to know You and to accept Jesus as the one You sent.

4-5. "I have finished the work that You gave Me to do. I have brought honor to Your name. So when I come home, make Me one with You again and give Me the glory that I had before We created this world.

6-8. "I have shown My disciples what You are like by doing the things You would do if You were here. They lis-

tened to Me and obeyed Your word, so they belong to You. They know that what I taught them came from You. I told them everything that You told Me to tell them. They have accepted it and believe that You are the one who sent Me.

9-10. "Father, I especially pray for them right now. These men are My disciples, so they are Yours, too. Everything I have is Yours, and all You have is Mine. But these are the men who have to carry on Our mission.

11. "Soon I'll be coming home, but they will be left in the world. Please watch over them so that they can honor You by being one with Us, even as You and I are one.

12. "All the time that I have been here I have watched over them and kept them together. I have not lost one of them, except Judas, who betrayed Me.

13. "So now I'm ready to come home. I have told these men about You so that they may have the same relationship with You that I have.

14-16. "I sent them out to tell others about You, but people hated them just as they hated Me. They don't belong here any more than I do. I'm asking You not to take them out of this world, but to keep them from the evil that is here. They are not part of this world, even as I am not.

17-19. "Prepare them for service through the truth that's in Your word. I have sent them into the world, just as You have sent Me here. I have given them an example of what it means to be of service to You.

20-23. "Father, I am not praying just for these men, but for all those who will believe in Me. They need to be one as We are one, so the world can see that You sent Me. When I'm in their hearts as You are in Mine, that will help people to know that You sent Me and love them as You love Me.

24. "Father, I would like these men to be with Me someday to see the glory I had before We created the world together.

25-26. "Dear Father, the world doesn't know You as I do. These men know that You sent Me. I told them about You and will continue telling them, so that the same love that I have for You, and You for Me, will be in them."

Jesus Arrested

18 When Jesus finished praying, He and His disciples crossed the valley outside Jerusalem and went up to the little garden grove on the side of the Mount of Olives.

2-3. Judas knew the place because Jesus and the disciples had often gone there to pray. Soon he arrived with some Roman soldiers, Temple guards, and priests looking for Jesus. They had lanterns, torches, and swords.

4-5. Jesus had been praying, but when He heard them coming He knew what would happen to Him. He went to meet them and asked, "Are you looking for someone?" They replied, "We're looking for Jesus of Nazareth." He answered, "I am Jesus." And Judas confirmed it.

6-8. The soldiers stepped back, and then fell down. When they got up, Jesus asked again, "For whom are you looking?" Again they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." He answered, "I told you that I am Jesus. So you may let these other men go."

9. What He had earlier said to the Father came true, that He had lost none of the disciples that God had given Him. (God had not picked Judas; the disciples had.)

10. When Peter saw that they had come to arrest Jesus, he pulled out his short sword, charged at the servant of the high priest, and sliced off his ear.

11-12. Jesus called out, "Peter, stop! Put away your sword. Shouldn't I drink the cup of suffering that My Father wants Me to drink?" Then the officer in charge ordered his men to arrest Jesus. They grabbed Him, tied His hands, and led Him away.

13-14. First they took Jesus to Annas, the retired high priest. He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the new high priest. Caiaphas was the one who had earlier said that it was better for Jesus to die than for the whole country to suffer.

15-16. Peter and John followed the mob to the high priest's palace, where Jesus would stand trial. John knew the girl at the gate to the courtyard, and she let him in. Then John went to get Peter, and she let him in, too.

17-18. The girl looked at Peter and said, "You're one of Jesus' disciples, aren't you?" Peter replied, "No, I'm not." Then he joined the servants and guards gathered around the fire, because it was cold.

Jesus Questioned

19-21. Meanwhile, inside the palace Annas was questioning Jesus about what He had been teaching. Jesus said, "I never taught in secret, but always openly in churches or in the Temple, where anyone could listen. So all you have to do is to ask those who heard Me, and they will tell you what I said."

22-23. Then one of the Temple guards slapped Jesus across the mouth and said, "Is that the way You talk to the high priest?" Jesus answered, "If I said something wrong, tell Me what it was. If I spoke the truth, then why did you hit Me?"

24. When all the council members arrived, Annas turned Jesus over to Caiaphas to complete the trial.

25-27. In the courtyard Peter was still

huddled by the fire warming himself. Someone asked, "Aren't you one of Jesus' disciples?" Peter answered forcefully, "I am not." Then one of the high priest's servants said, "I saw you with Jesus in the garden when we arrested Him." For the third time Peter denied knowing Jesus. Just then the rooster crowed.

28. By morning the Jewish council had decided to take Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor. But they went only to governor's courtyard, so that they wouldn't be defiled. Otherwise, they wouldn't be allowed to take part in the feast of the Passover.

29-30. Pilate came out on the balcony and asked, "What are you accusing this man of?" They answered, "If we didn't think He was guilty, we wouldn't have brought Him here."

31. Pilate said, "If you've already decided that, then punish Him by your own laws." The Jewish leaders replied, "But He deserves to die, and we're not allowed to execute people without your permission."

32. Pilate and the Jewish leaders continued to argue over whether Jesus should die or not. Finally the priests persuaded Pilate, and he ordered Jesus to be crucified, just as the prophets had predicted.

33-34. Before this, Pilate had talked to Jesus. He asked, "Are You the King of the Jews, as they say You are?" Jesus replied, "Are you asking Me on your own because you want to know, or did someone tell you to ask Me?"

35. Pilate said, "I'm not a Jew. Why should I care? It's Your own people who brought You here. I didn't arrest You. You must have done something wrong. What was it?"

36-37. Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world, or My servants would fight for me. My kingdom is a

spiritual kingdom." Pilate said, "So You are a king." Jesus replied, "You say that I am a king, and it's true. I was born to be one. Whoever wants to know the truth listens to Me."

38. Pilate laughed and said, "What is truth? Every teacher says he has the truth." Then he went back outside and said to the priests, "I can't find anything to execute Jesus for."

39. "But I'll tell you what I'll do for you. Each year at Passover time, Rome lets me release one Jewish prisoner. Why don't we release Jesus?"

40. The priests said, "Absolutely not! We'd rather release Barabbas." Then the mob started chanting for Pilate to release Barabbas, even though he was a terrorist.

Pilate Tries to Set Jesus Free

19 Pilate wanted to set Jesus free, but he also wanted to please the priests. So he ordered Jesus whipped and hoped that that would be enough.

2-3. The soldiers took Jesus and decided to have some fun with Him. One of them made a crown out of thorny branches and forced it down on Jesus' head. Another brought an old purple robe and draped it over Jesus' shoulders. Then they shouted, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Each soldier stepped forward and slapped Jesus in the face as hard as he could.

4-5. Pilate said to the priests, "I want you to know that I find no fault in Him." Then he brought Jesus out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. He said, "Look at this man! Doesn't this satisfy you?"

6. When the priests saw Jesus, they shouted, "Crucify Him!" Then the mob joined in, shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" This really upset Pilate. He said, "If you want to exe-

cute Him, go ahead. You have my permission. But I do not find Him guilty."

7-9. The priests said, "He needs to die, because He claims to be the Son of God." When Pilate heard that, he got scared. So he took Jesus back inside and asked, "Where are You from?" But Jesus remained silent.

10-11. Pilate said, "Aren't You going to answer me? Don't you know that I have power to crucify You or release You?" Jesus said, "You wouldn't have any power if God hadn't given it to you. Those who brought Me to you are the guilty ones."

12. Then Pilate really tried to release Jesus, but the priests said, "If you let Him go, then you're not a friend of the Roman emperor, because Jesus wants to be king."

13-14. When Pilate heard that, he knew that things were serious. So he brought Jesus out again and took his seat as judge. This was early Friday morning. The next day would be the Passover and the Sabbath. Pilate said to the priests, "Here is your King! What shall I do with Him?"

15-16. The mob shouted, "Take Him away! Crucify Him!" Pilate said, "Do you want me to crucify your King?" Encouraged by the priests, the mob shouted, "We have no king but Caesar." Then Pilate ordered Jesus to be crucified. So the soldiers came and took Him away.

Jesus Is Crucified

17-18. They put a heavy cross on Jesus' shoulders for Him to carry to the place of execution outside the city. There they crucified Him between two thieves and robbers.

19-20. Above Jesus' head they nailed a sign that Pilate had ordered that read "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." The sign was written in three

languages so that as many people as possible could read it.

21-22. But the priests didn't like it. So they went to Pilate and said, "The sign is wrong. It should read 'He Said He Was King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

23-24. At the place of crucifixion the soldiers divided Jesus' clothes among themselves. When they looked at his warm outer robe, they said, "Let's not cut it up and divide it. Let's gamble for it." This is what David had predicted when he said, "They will take my clothes and gamble for my robe."

25. Standing near the cross was Mary, the mother of Jesus; her sister Salome; Mary, the sister of Lazarus; and another woman named Mary.

26-27. When Jesus saw His mother crying, He said, "Mother, don't cry. John will be your son in My place. He'll take care of you." Then He said, "John, take care of My mother for Me." And John did.

28-29. Jesus knew that soon He would die and that His mission would end. His suffering and pain were intense. Because He was very thirsty, He asked the soldiers for some water. Nearby was a container of wine mixed with drugs to kill pain. A soldier took a long stick with a sponge on the end, dipped it in the wine, and held it up to Jesus' lips. But when Jesus tasted it, He spit it out.

30. After that, Jesus looked up to heaven and said loudly, "It is finished!" Then He bowed His head and died.

31-33. Meanwhile the priests had gone to Pilate and asked him to order his soldiers to break the legs of those crucified so they would die before Sabbath. Pilate agreed. Then the soldiers broke the legs of the two criminals. But when they came to Jesus, He was already dead.

34. The Roman officer wanted to make sure that Jesus was dead. So he took his spear and thrust it into Jesus' side. When blood and water came out, he knew for sure that Jesus was dead.

35. I, John, was there and saw it. So what I'm telling you is true. I know that Jesus was dead.

36-37. All this was predicted by David and the prophet Zechariah when they said, "Not one of His bones will be broken. But His side will be pierced."

Jesus Is Buried

38-39. A Jewish leader named Joseph, who was a follower of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked permission to bury Jesus' body. Pilate gave permission. Nicodemus, the Jewish leader whom Jesus had talked to at night about being born again, brought burial supplies and spices.

40. They took the body of Jesus down from the cross and wrapped it in a linen cloth with the spices.

41-42. Nearby was a garden cemetery with an unused burial place belonging to Joseph. It was like a little cave dug out of the rock. They quickly laid Jesus there because it was nearly sunset, the beginning of the Sabbath.

The Resurrection

20 Before the sun came up on Sunday morning, Lazarus' sister, Mary Magdalene, came to the garden cemetery alone. As she approached the tomb, she noticed that the huge stone covering the opening had been rolled away.

2. Immediately she turned and ran back to the city. She was terribly upset, and said to Peter and John, "Someone has stolen the Lord's body! The stone is rolled away from the tomb. Now we don't know where they have taken Him."

3-5. So Peter and John ran to the tomb. John got there first. Stooping, he looked inside and saw the linen gravecloth neatly folded, but he didn't go in.

6-7. When Peter arrived, he went right inside and noticed that the head cloth was lying folded where Jesus' head had been. He knew that thieves wouldn't bother to do that.

8-10. Then John also went inside, and he saw the same thing. Jesus' body was gone. Neither of them yet understood what the prophets had meant by saying that the Messiah would die, but rise again. Slowly they walked back to town.

11-13. By the time Mary returned to the tomb, Peter and John were gone. She stood there crying, then went inside to look. She noticed two angels dressed in white sitting where Jesus' body had been. They asked, "Why are you crying?" She answered, "Someone stole my Lord's body, and I don't know where they've taken it."

14. She didn't realize she was talking to angels. As she bent low to go back outside, she saw someone standing there, but didn't know it was Jesus.

15. He said to her, "Why are you crying? For whom are you looking?" She thought it was the caretaker. Through her tears she asked, "Sir, do You know where my Lord's body is? If You moved it, please let me know where You put it."

16-17. Then Jesus said, "Mary." Only Jesus could say her name like that. She looked up and said, "Teacher! Is that You?" Jesus answered, "Yes, but don't hold Me back, because My Father is waiting for Me. Go and tell the disciples that I've gone to My Father and your Father, My God and your God. But I'll be back."

18-19. Mary could hardly believe it.

She hurried to the city and told the disciples that Jesus was alive. She had seen Him and even talked to Him. But the disciples were afraid. They locked the door because people were saying that they had stolen the body of Jesus. Now the authorities would be looking for them.

20. Suddenly Jesus stood in the room and said, "Peace to all of you." He showed them the scars in His hands and in His side. Then they believed that it was Jesus, and their hearts were filled with joy.

21-23. Again He said, "Peace to all of you. As My Father sent Me on My mission, so am I sending you." Then He took a deep breath, and as He breathed out, He said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. He will help you carry out My mission. When people accept Me, you can tell them that they are forgiven, and they will be. But if they reject Me, you can't tell them that."

24-25. Now, Thomas wasn't there when that happened. By the time he got there, Jesus had left. The disciples told him that Jesus was alive and that they had seen Him and talked with Him. Thomas said, "Until I see His scars and touch them, I will not believe it."

26-27. A week later the disciples were back in this same room with the door locked. All at once Jesus appeared and said, "Peace to all of you." Then He said, "Thomas, come here. Take a look at My scars and touch them. Don't doubt, but believe."

28-29. Thomas was speechless. Then he fell on his knees and said, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said, "Because you saw Me, you now believe what your brothers told you. Blessed are those who will hear the gospel and believe what they've been told even though they haven't seen Me."

30-31. Jesus did many other things while He was here that are not written down. But the things that are written are enough for you to know that He is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God. Through faith, you can have eternal life because of what He did for you.

Jesus Has Breakfast

21 The next time the disciples saw Jesus was by the Lake of Galilee. Seven of them were there: Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, James, John, and two other disciples. **3.** Peter suggested that they go fishing, and the others agreed. They fished all that night, but caught nothing.

4-5. As the sun was coming up, Jesus appeared on the beach. But they didn't recognize Him. As they came closer to shore, He called out, "Did you catch anything?" They called back, "No, we haven't."

6. He suggested, "Throw out your net on the right side of the boat, and you'll catch some." When they did, they caught so many fish that they couldn't pull them all into the boat.

7-8. Then John recognized the Man on the beach and said to Peter, "It's Jesus!" Peter was half naked. He quickly put on his robe, jumped into the water, and headed for Jesus. The disciples were still a little way from shore and had a hard time dragging the netful of fish behind the boat.

9. When they finally reached shore, they saw a little fire with some fish on it. They also noticed some bread. Jesus had made breakfast for them.

10-11. Jesus said, "Bring some more fish with you when you come." Peter rushed back and helped drag the net to shore. They counted 153 big fish and were amazed that the net didn't break with such a large catch.

12-14. Then Jesus called, "Come, it's

time to eat." As they came and sat down to eat, no one had to ask Him who He was. They all knew. Jesus gave each man a fish and some bread. This was the third time Jesus appeared to the disciples after being raised from the dead.

Jesus And Peter

15. When they finished eating, Jesus said, "Peter, do you love Me more than these other men?" "Yes, Lord," Peter answered. "You know that I'm Your friend." Jesus said, "That's good. Take care of My lambs."

16. Jesus asked again, "Peter, do you really love Me?" Peter answered, "Yes, Lord, You know that I love You." Jesus replied, "That's good. Take care of My sheep."

17. Then Jesus asked a third time, "Peter, are you sure you love Me?" With tears in his eyes Peter replied, "Lord, You know everything. You know me better than I know myself and whether I really love You or not." Jesus said, "I know you love Me. Take care of My lambs and sheep."

18. "You're still strong. You can decide what to do and where to go. But when you're old, other people will decide for you. They'll stretch out your arms and take you where you don't want to go."

19. Jesus said this to let Peter know that someday he would be crucified, as He had been. Then Jesus said, "Whatever happens between now and then, keep following Me."

John and the Gospel

20-21. Later that morning as the disciples were walking along the beach, Peter was up front with Jesus. John was close behind. This was the same John who had sat next to Jesus at the Passover supper. Peter looked back at

John and said to Jesus, "What's John's future? What is he going to do?"

22-23. Jesus replied, "If I wanted him to live until I come back, he would. But keep your eyes on Me and don't worry about John." Then the rumor got started that John would never die. But that's not what Jesus had said. He had said, "If I wanted him to

live until I come back, he would."

24-25. I am that John, and I'm the one writing this Gospel. Everything I'm telling you is true. There are many other things I could tell you about Jesus and what He did. But if all these things were to be written down, I think the whole world couldn't hold all the books that would be written.

Acts

INTRODUCTION: *This book was also written by Luke. He was a missionary with Paul to many cities in the Roman Empire and records many of the things that happened to them. From this book we learn that after Jesus went back to heaven the Holy Spirit came to help the disciples and others take the gospel to that whole part of the world. It covers the time from about A.D. 30 to 60. The two important people in the book are Peter and Paul.*

Jesus Goes to Heaven

1 My dear friend Theophilus, the first report I sent to you was about what Jesus did and taught until He returned to heaven. He told His disciples what they should do and promised that the Holy Spirit would come to help them.

3. After His resurrection He spent forty days with His disciples and appeared to numerous people many times. He talked with them, ate with them, and taught them many things about God's kingdom.

4-5. At His last meeting He told them to remain in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit, who would give them power to carry on His mission.

6-8. They asked Him if now was the time when He would set up His kingdom and restore the glory of Israel. He said, "It isn't necessary for you to know when that will happen. What is important is for you to receive power to preach the gospel in Jerusalem, in Israel, in Samaria, and to the whole world."

9-11. After He said that, they walked to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus began to rise up into the sky until He disappeared in the clouds. While they were looking up, suddenly, two angels appeared. They asked, "Why

do you stand here looking into the sky? One day Jesus will come back the same way you saw Him go."

Judas Replaced

12-14. Then the apostles went back to Jerusalem to the place they were staying. There was Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, the younger James, Simon, and Thaddaeus. They prayed together and were soon joined by some of the women, including Jesus' mother, and also by His stepbrothers.

15-17. Later about 120 believers met together for prayer. Peter stood up and said, "Brothers and sisters, the prophecies about Jesus have been fulfilled, including the one about Judas betraying Him. Judas became one of us only because we urged Jesus to take him.

18. "After he betrayed Jesus, he went and hanged himself. As you know, the rope broke, and his body hit the ground so hard that it broke open and his intestines spilled out.

19. "The news spread quickly among the people. Then the priests used the money they had given Judas and bought a small field where they buried him. The people named the field 'The Place of Blood.'

20. "In the Psalms it says, 'Let the house of the one who betrayed the Messiah become empty.' And in another psalm it says, 'Let someone else take his place.'"

21-22. "So we need someone who has been with us from the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He must be someone who knew Jesus from the time He was baptized until after His resurrection, and who saw Him taken up to heaven."

23-26. The believers agreed, and gave Peter the names of two men, Joseph and Matthias. Then they prayed and asked the Lord which one should replace Judas. After praying, they drew lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. So he became one of the twelve.

Pentecost

2 For the next ten days the believers prayed for the Holy Spirit, as Jesus had told them to. One day they heard a noise outside that sounded like a strong wind. Soon it filled the house. Then they saw something that looked like little flames of fire over each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, who gave them power to speak in different languages.

5-6. At that time Jerusalem was filled with visitors from all over the Roman Empire. They had come for the festival of Pentecost. Some of them had also heard the noise, and soon word spread throughout the city that something strange was happening. When the apostles came out and spoke, each person heard them in their own language.

7-8. They exclaimed, "This is amazing! Aren't these men from here? How come we can hear them speak in our own language at the same time?"

9-13. People had come to Jerusalem from many countries. Some had even come from as far away as Libya and

Arabia. Yet everyone heard the apostles speak in their own language. Some said, "What does all this mean? This is nothing but a miracle." Others said, "No, these men are drunk."

Peter's Sermon

14-16. Then Peter spoke in a loud voice, "Listen to me. No matter where you've come from, I have something to tell you. We are not drunk. After all, it's only nine o'clock in the morning. What has happened is a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy when God proclaimed, 17-18. "'In those days, I will pour out My Spirit on your sons and daughters to help them proclaim My message. I will speak to them in visions and to your older men in dreams. Men and women will talk to others about Me, and some will prophesy.

19-21. "'In the last days I will perform miracles. The sky will turn red, and fire and smoke will fill the air. The sun will become dark, and the moon will look as red as blood. This will happen in the days before the return of the Lord. And whoever calls on the Lord will be saved.'

22-23. "So listen to me. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, but we know by all the miracles He did that He was the Son of God. Yet our leaders turned Him over to the Romans, who crucified Him. God knew this would happen and did nothing to stop it, because Jesus had to come and die for our sins.

24-28. "Then God resurrected Him. Death could not hold Him. This is what David meant when he said, 'The Lord is always by my side. That's why I'm happy and keep singing. I know I will live again. God will not let me remain dead forever. He will not let His Son rot in the grave. I know I will see my Savior.'

29-31. "David was not talking about

himself. He died and is buried right here in Jerusalem. He was not only our king, but also a prophet. He believed what God said, and knew that one of his descendants would be our King forever. That's why God did not let the Messiah stay in the grave, but resurrected Him.

32-33. "Jesus died, but God raised Him from the dead. We saw Him with our own eyes. We also saw Him return to heaven, where He is now, sitting next to God the Father. He promised to send the Holy Spirit to help us share this good news. That is what is happening here this morning.

34-36. "David wasn't resurrected, nor did he go to heaven to sit next to God. He wasn't talking about himself when he heard God say, 'Come, sit next to Me.' David was writing about Jesus. The One who was crucified is our real Lord and King."

37-39. When the people heard that, they felt guilty and said, "What should we do?" Peter answered, "Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins and as a sign that you belong to Him. Then you too will be given the Holy Spirit. So this promise is for everyone, because God is calling all of us to come to Him."

Thousands Baptized

40-42. Peter appealed to them not to turn against Jesus, as the Jewish leaders had, but to give their hearts to God and be saved. As a result, about 3,000 were baptized and added to the church. They loved their new faith and enjoyed each other's company. They ate together, shared their food, and prayed for each other.

43-45. The apostles also worked miracles and healed all kinds of diseases. People were amazed at what these

men could do. The believers were like one big family. They shared everything they had. Some even sold their property and used the money to help members who were poor.

46-47. Every day they went to the Temple to pray. With humble hearts they invited people to their homes to eat and talk. They were always happy, thanking God for what He had done for them. And everybody loved them. More and more people were added to the church daily.

A Crippled Man Healed

3 Late one afternoon Peter and John went to the Temple to pray. When they came to the gate, they saw a crippled man sitting there begging for money. He did this every day.

3-5. When he saw Peter and John, he asked them for money too. Peter said, "Look at us and listen." The man looked hopefully at them, expecting a donation.

6-8. Peter then said, "We don't have any money, but what we have we'll give you. In the name of Jesus Christ, stand up and walk." Then he reached down to help him up. Just like that, the man's legs and feet straightened out, and he stood up on his own. Then he followed Peter and John into the Temple jumping up and down, praising God.

9-11. The people recognized him as the one who had sat at the gate every day begging. They could hardly believe it. Word spread, and soon people came running from everywhere to see. The man, standing beside Peter and John, was praising God.

12-14. When Peter saw the crowd, he said to them, "Why are you so surprised? This man wasn't healed by our power. Let me tell you how. The God of Abraham sent His Son to come and

save us. But our leaders turned Him over to the Romans for crucifixion. Pilate found Him innocent, yet some of you demanded that He be killed.

15-16. "And in one sense, we're all guilty of His death. But God raised Jesus from the dead! We saw Him alive and watched Him return to heaven. It was Jesus who healed this man because he believed. Now he can walk, as you can see.

17-18. "I know you didn't know what you were doing when you killed Jesus, and neither did our leaders. But God knew. Through the prophets He said that the Messiah would come, suffer, and die. That's what happened.

19-21. "So repent and be converted. God will forgive you, and the Holy Spirit will come into your hearts, as Jesus promised. He is your Savior and Lord. Right now He's in heaven. But He will return when the time comes for everything to be made right.

22-24. "This is what Moses had in mind when he said, 'God will send a mighty Prophet. When He comes, listen to Him. Those who refuse to obey Him will no longer be part of God's people.' Other prophets, such as Samuel and those who followed him, saw these things in vision.

25-26. "You are part of God's people, to whom He gave His promises through the prophets. He said to Abraham, 'Through your descendants the whole world will be blessed.' So God sent Jesus to us and raised Him from the dead so that you would turn from your sins and be saved."

Peter and John Arrested

4 While Peter and John were talking to the people, the officer in charge of the Temple guards came, along with some priests, and arrested them. The priests were upset

because the apostles had told people that Jesus rose from the dead. So they took them away and put them in jail.

4. But many people believed Peter and John and accepted Jesus as the Messiah. The number of believers grew to about 5,000 men, not counting women and children.

5-7. The next morning the leaders called a meeting to decide what to do. Annas, the retired high priest, his son-in-law Caiaphas, and the rest of the men in the high priestly family were all there. They brought Peter, John, and the beggar in and asked how this thing had happened.

8-10. Peter said, "Honored leaders, if you want to know how this man was healed, you and the people have a right to know. This man was healed in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified and raised from the dead. It was Jesus' power that did it, not ours.

11-12. "Jesus is the cornerstone that you have rejected, just as the Temple builders in Solomon's time found a perfect cornerstone but then rejected it. Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith. Salvation comes only from Him; there is no other way to be saved."

13-14. When the leaders and council members heard Peter and John, they were amazed at how well they spoke, since they were uneducated and untrained. But they had been with Jesus. Seeing the beggar standing there healed, they had nothing more to say.

15-17. They commanded all three of them to wait outside while they decided what to do. They said to each other, "There's no doubt that this beggar is healed. We can't deny it. Probably everyone in Jerusalem knows it by now. So what shall we do? I guess all that we can do is give Peter and John a warning and tell them to stop preaching."

18-20. So they called Peter and John back in and demanded that they stop preaching about Jesus. Peter and John said, "Whether it is more important to listen to God or to you, you'll have to decide. But we've decided that if people ask us about Jesus and what happened to the beggar, we have to tell them."

21-22. The leaders warned them again, and let them go. They couldn't punish Peter and John, because people were praising God for what they had done. Everyone knew that the forty-year-old beggar had been crippled since birth.

Believers Pray for Courage

23. As soon as Peter and John were released, they went to tell the other believers what had happened. They told them that they had been arrested and warned not to preach about Jesus again.

24-26. When the believers heard that, they prayed, "O Lord, You are the Creator of heaven and earth. You spoke through David when he said, 'Why are unbelievers so angry with us? Why have kings and local rulers taken a stand against God and His Son?'

27-30. "Lord, this is what happened when Jesus was born. King Herod wanted to kill Him. Later the priests turned Him over to Pilate to be crucified. Lord, You knew this would happen. Now they're threatening us. Please give us courage to speak for You. Also give us power to work more miracles in Your name."

31. As soon as they had finished praying, the place where they were meeting began to shake. Everyone was filled with courage from the Holy Spirit. Then they went out and spoke boldly to others about Jesus.

32-33. The believers were one in

heart and spirit. They gladly shared everything they had with each other. And the apostles preached about Jesus with great power, and God blessed their work for Him.

34-35. Everyone's needs were supplied. Those who had houses and property sold them and gave the money to the apostles, who gave it to those in need. Some lost their jobs for believing in Jesus, but no one was in real need.

36-37. One of the believers was Joseph, whom the members called Barnabas, meaning "The one who encourages others." He too sold his property and gave the money to the apostles.

Two People Lie

5 Among the believers was a couple named Ananias and Sapphira. They too agreed to sell their property and give the money for the poor. But then they changed their minds and decided to keep part of it. The rest Ananias took to the apostles.

3-4. Peter asked, "Ananias, why did you lie to the Holy Spirit? You're saying that you sold the property for this much when you didn't. Before you promised to give it all, you could have divided it as you saw fit. But once you promised to give all of it to the Lord and then gave only part of it, you lied not only to us, but to God."

5-6. When Ananias heard that, he collapsed and died. News of what happened spread among the believers, and they had a new respect for the Holy Spirit. Then Peter asked some young men to wrap up Ananias' body, carry it out, and bury it.

7-9. About three hours later Sapphira came in. Peter asked, "Did you and your husband sell the property for this much?" She replied, "Yes, we did." Peter said, "Why did the two of

you agree to lie to the Holy Spirit? A few hours ago, when we told your husband that he was lying, he dropped dead. Now the young men who buried him are coming to carry you out too."

10-11. When Sapphira heard that, she also collapsed and died. When the young men returned from burying her husband, they saw that she too had died. So they wrapped up her body, carried it out, and buried her next to her husband. When the believers heard about this, a holy reverence for God came upon the whole church.

Miracles

12-14. In answer to the believers' prayers, the apostles were also given power to work miracles and to heal people of all kinds of diseases. Every day the believers went to the Temple to pray. But some were afraid to go, because they might be arrested. The apostles were highly respected among the people. And every day more and more people were added to the church.

15-16. Peter became so well known that people brought their sick family members and friends on stretchers and placed them along the streets. They were hoping that his shadow would fall on them and that they would be healed. People came from everywhere bringing their sick, some of whom were demon-possessed. And the apostles healed them all.

17-20. The priests and leaders then arrested the apostles and put them in jail. But that night the Lord sent an angel to open the jail doors and let them out. He said, "The Lord wants you to go back to the Temple tomorrow morning and tell the people about Jesus."

21-23. Early the next morning the apostles went to the Temple to

preach. That same morning the high priest had called together the council members. They asked the guards to go to the prison and bring the two apostles to court. Soon they came running back, exclaiming, "When we got there, the jail doors were locked. The prison guards were there, but the two apostles were gone!"

24-26. While they were all wondering what could have happened, a man rushed in and said, "The men you arrested yesterday are in the Temple preaching about Jesus!" The high priest ordered the guards to go and arrest them. They did, but they were careful not to upset the people who were listening to them.

27-28. As soon as the apostles were brought into the courtroom, the high priest began questioning them. "Didn't we tell you not to preach about Jesus? You have preached about Him all over the city, telling people that we killed Him."

29-32. Peter answered, "We ought to obey God rather than men. You took Jesus to Pilate and demanded that he crucify Him. But God raised Jesus from the dead and took Him to heaven to sit next to Him. It's Jesus who gives people the ability to repent. We have seen it happen over and over as the Holy Spirit comes into their lives and changes them."

33-34. This really offended the council members, and they decided to execute the two apostles. But one of them asked that the apostles be taken out of the courtroom.

35-37. Then he said, "We need to think carefully about what we do to these men. Before Jesus came, there was someone else who claimed that God had sent him to deliver us from the Romans. But he got killed, and nothing ever came of it. After him

another one came, and the same thing happened.

38-39. "So let's be careful what we do to these men, because it will only draw attention to them. Let's just leave them alone. If what they're doing was their own idea, they'll fail, just as the other men did. But if this whole thing is from God, we can't stop it anyway. And we certainly don't want to be fighting against God."

40-42. The council members agreed. So they brought the two apostles back in and had them whipped. They warned them again to stop preaching about Jesus, and then let them go. The apostles went home rejoicing. The next day they were back in the Temple and in people's houses sharing with them the good news about Jesus.

Seven Deacons

6 As the number of believers grew, there was a disagreement among them. The Greek-speaking followers claimed that their widows didn't receive the same help as the widows of the Jewish followers.

2-4. So the apostles called the believers together and said, "It's not right for us to stop preaching to supervise the distribution of food. You need to choose seven men with common sense, who are filled with the Holy Spirit, to do this for you. This will give us more time to study, pray, and preach the word of God."

5-6. The believers thought this was a good idea. The first man they chose was Stephen. He was a good man with strong faith and filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they picked six other men. One was Philip. They took these men to the apostles, who prayed for them and ordained them as deacons.

7. The apostles continued preaching the Word of God with power. Every

day new believers were added to the church, and the followers in Jerusalem grew larger and larger. Many priests also believed and obeyed.

Stephen Arrested

8. Not only was Stephen a deacon, but also the Holy Spirit gave him power to preach and to work miracles healing the sick.

9-10. Some men from different parts of the Roman Empire who were in Jerusalem challenged what Stephen was preaching. But the Holy Spirit gave him such wisdom that the men were speechless.

11-12. So they bribed people to lie about Stephen. These men claimed that they had heard him curse Moses and God. This turned the people and priests against Stephen. And when the authorities heard about it, they had him arrested and brought to court.

13-14. More false witnesses were brought in. They lied, "We heard him curse Moses and God and even speak against the Temple. He's saying that Jesus will come back, destroy the Temple, and change the laws of Moses."

15. When the council members looked at Stephen standing in the courtroom, they could tell that he was a man of faith, because his face looked as innocent as an angel's.

Stephen's Defense

7 Then the high priest said to Stephen, "Are these charges against you true?" Stephen said, "Fellow citizens, please listen to me. Centuries ago God spoke to Abraham.

3-5. "He said, 'I want you to leave your country and go to a land that I will show you.' So Abraham left and moved here. God didn't give him this land as soon as he came, but promised that someday it would

belong to his descendants. This was even before Isaac was born.

6-7. "God said, 'At first your descendants will be as foreigners where they live. Then they'll become slaves in another country. All this will last more than 400 years. But I will set them free and bring them out of there, and they will worship Me in this place.'

8. "So God made a covenant with Abraham. Later He worked a miracle, and Isaac was born. When Isaac grew up and got married, Jacob was born, who became the father of our twelve tribes.

9-10. "Jacob's sons became jealous of Joseph and sold him as a slave to be taken to Egypt. But he was faithful, and God was with him in all his troubles. God gave Joseph wisdom to interpret the king's dream. So the king took Joseph out of prison and made him governor of Egypt.

11-13. "Then the land became very dry, and nothing grew in Egypt or Canaan. Jacob and his sons couldn't find enough to eat. They heard that Egypt had prepared for this famine. So Joseph's brothers went there to buy food. The second time they went he told them who he was. When the king heard about it, he told Joseph to invite his whole family to Egypt.

14-16. "So Joseph sent for his father and brothers and their families. They all moved to Egypt, all seventy-five of them. When Jacob and his sons died, they were brought back to this land and buried in a cave that once belonged to Abraham.

17-19. "When the time came for God to fulfill His promise and deliver them, Jacob's descendants had become a small nation. By then another king, who refused to respect Joseph for what he had done for Egypt, had come to the throne. He made our people slaves and ordered all the boy babies killed.

20-22. "That's when Moses was born. His parents hid him for three months. Then they put him in a basket on the edge of the river. The princess found him, and raised him as her own son. He was highly educated and became a great military leader.

23-25. "When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit the Hebrew people. When he saw an Egyptian guard mistreating one of them, he tried to protect the Hebrew, but ended up killing the Egyptian. Moses thought that our people would take this as a signal to rally around him for deliverance. But they didn't.

26-28. "The next day he went back and saw two Hebrews fighting. He separated them and said, 'You two are brothers why are you fighting?' One of them retorted, 'Who put you in charge of us? You're not our leader. Are you going to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?'

29. "Then Moses knew that they didn't want him to be their leader. So he left Egypt and went to the land of Midian and herded sheep. There he got married and had two sons.

30-33. "Forty years later God spoke to Moses near Mount Sinai. Moses saw a bush on fire, but it didn't burn up. So he went over to take a look. God spoke from the bush and said, 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' When Moses heard God's voice, he was afraid. The Lord said, 'Take off your sandals. This is holy ground.'

34. "'I have seen how My people are being treated in Egypt. I have heard their prayers and have decided to set them free. I want you to go back to Egypt to bring them out.'

35-36. "Moses recalled the words of the man he had tried to help years ago who had said, 'You're not our leader.' But God did appoint Moses as

our leader, and He helped him set our people free. God worked many miracles through Moses, first in Egypt, then at the Red Sea, and as he led them through the wilderness.

37-38. "It was Moses who said, 'God will send you a great Prophet to lead you as He sent me.' This is the same Moses who received from God the Ten Commandments and other good words to guide us.

39-41. "But our people refused to listen to Moses. They wanted to worship things they could see. So they said to Aaron, 'Make us a god who will take us back to Egypt.' So they made a golden calf and worshiped it.

42-43. "In Canaan they worshiped the sun, moon, and stars. Later the prophet Amos said, 'Do not carve statues of gods and offer sacrifices to these pieces of wood to bless you. If you do this, God will let the Babylonians come, take your city, and carry you away to Babylon.' And that's what happened.

44-45. "But before this, while they were still in the wilderness, God told Moses to build a sanctuary, a holy tent, according to the pattern He showed him. Our people carried this tent with them wherever they went, even into Canaan. They worshiped at the sanctuary right up to the time of David.

46-50. "Then David wanted to build a Temple for God. But God said, 'No.' So Solomon built it. We know that God doesn't need a Temple. As the prophet Isaiah said: 'Heaven and earth belong to God. No building can hold Him. He doesn't need a place to rest. His hands made everything.'"

Stephen Cuts His Sermon Short

51. Stephen could see that the council members had become upset when he had said that the Temple was not

necessary and that God didn't need it. So he said, "You are stubborn, as your ancestors were in the wilderness.

52-53. "There was hardly a prophet that your ancestors didn't mistreat or persecute. They even killed some of them. Not one of you spoke up for John the Baptist when he was arrested. To make things worse, you turned Jesus over to the Romans to be crucified. This makes you murderers. You claim to teach God's law, but you don't keep it yourselves."

54-56. When the council members heard that, they really got mad at Stephen. But he looked up to heaven and said, "I see Jesus standing next to God, looking down on us and watching all this."

57-58. The council members shouted, "Stop him! We don't want to hear any more!" They grabbed Stephen and pushed him out of the courtroom and through the streets to a place outside the city. They took off their outer robes and laid them at the feet of a young man named Saul, who agreed with them.

59-60. Then they picked up stones and threw them at Stephen. He cried out, "Jesus, I give my life to You!" As he sank to his knees, he cried out again, "Please don't hold this sin against them!" But they kept stoning him until he slumped to the ground and died.

Persecution

8 After the death of Stephen, the Jewish high court gave young Saul permission to persecute the whole church. Many believers left Jerusalem and scattered everywhere, even to other countries. Only the apostles and a few believers were left. Some who had watched Stephen being stoned cried really hard as they buried him.

3. Saul was determined to kill every

last believer. He and his helpers went from house to house looking for them. He dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

4-8. Other believers, who had scattered, went everywhere telling people about Jesus. Philip, a deacon, was one of them. He went to the city of Samaria, and the people there heard him gladly. He even healed people, including those who had been paralyzed and demon-possessed. The whole city rejoiced.

9-11. A man named Simon who lived there practiced magic. A lot of people had listened to him, from the city officials to the poorest man on the street. They called him "The man with the power of God," because he had been using magic for a long time.

12-13. When the people heard about Jesus, many of them gave their hearts to Him and were baptized. Simon seemed to respond as well, so he too was baptized. Then He followed Philip everywhere, watching him heal people. He was amazed.

14-17. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard what was happening in Samaria, they sent Peter and John there to check on things. They were happy to see all these new believers who had been baptized in the name of Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and prayed that the Holy Spirit would give them power to live for Jesus. And He did.

18-19. When Simon saw all this, he offered the apostles money so he could do what they were doing. He said, "Please sell me that power so that I can give the Holy Spirit to people too."

20-23. Peter answered, "The gift of God can't be bought with money. If you think that you can use the Holy Spirit to collect money and become rich, it shows that Jesus is not really

in your heart. You need to repent of your selfish ways and ask God to forgive you. You're obviously being influenced by the devil and not by God."

24-25. Then Simon said, "Please pray so that nothing bad will happen to me." On their way back to Jerusalem Peter and John shared the good news about Jesus every chance they got.

Philip and the Ethiopian

26-28. Then an angel said to Philip, "Leave Samaria and go south past Jerusalem toward the desert." So Philip said goodbye to the believers and left. Meanwhile the treasurer for the queen of Ethiopia had come to Jerusalem to worship. He was now riding in his chariot on his way home and reading aloud from the book of Isaiah.

29-30. As his chariot approached, the Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Stay alongside this chariot and listen." Philip did so and heard the treasurer reading from Isaiah. Philip called out, "Do you understand what you're reading?"

31-34. The treasurer answered, "How can I, unless someone helps me?" Then he ordered his driver to stop and invited Philip to come up and help him. He showed him the passage he was reading where it talked about a man being killed like an innocent sheep. He asked, "Who is the prophet talking about?"

35-36. Philip explained that the prophecy was talking about Jesus. As they rode along, they studied together. And after some time they saw a small pond. The treasurer said, "Look! Why can't I be baptized here?"

37-38. Philip said, "If with all your heart you believe in Jesus and accept Him as your Savior, you may." The Ethiopian said, "I believe with all my heart that Jesus is the Son of God." Then he asked the driver to stop, and

he and Philip went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.

39. When they came out of the water, the Holy Spirit picked Philip up and carried him away. And the Ethiopian stepped back into his chariot and went on his way rejoicing.

40. Suddenly Philip found himself in the coastal city of Ashdod. From there he shared the good news about Jesus until he came to the city of Caesarea. That's where he decided to settle and to share his faith.

Saul's Conversion

9 In the meantime Saul kept persecuting the followers of Jesus wherever he found them. One day he asked the high priest for permission to go to Damascus to find Christians. He said he needed a letter authorizing him to arrest believers and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial.

3-4. The high priest gave him the letter, and Saul headed north to Damascus. As he and his helpers neared the city, suddenly a brilliant light from heaven flashed around him. It blinded him, and he fell to the ground. Then he heard a voice saying, "Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

5-6. Saul asked, "Who are you?" The voice answered, "I'm Jesus, the one you're persecuting. Your conscience has been bothering you ever since you saw Stephen being killed. So you've been fighting your guilt by taking it out on My people." Saul said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Jesus replied, "Go into the city, and you'll be told what to do."

7-9. Saul's helpers heard a voice but didn't see anyone. When Saul opened his eyes, he realized that he was totally blind. His friends had to lead him into the city. For the next three days he sat in his room refusing to eat or drink. In

his mind he kept going over the prophecies about the Messiah.

10-12. In Damascus there was a believer named Ananias. The Lord said to Ananias, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a young man named Saul. He's there fasting and praying and needs help. In a vision I showed him that you would come, put your hands on him, and restore his sight."

13-14. Ananias said, "Lord, isn't this the man who has been sending Your people in Jerusalem to prison? I've heard that the high priest has given him permission to do the same thing here."

15-16. The Lord said, "Go and do what I've told you to do. I want Saul to serve Me and to carry the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. I need to tell him how much he will have to suffer for My sake."

17. So Ananias went to see Saul. He said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who stopped you on the way here and talked with you, sent me to heal you." Then he prayed, put his hands on Saul's head, and said, "Receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

18-19. Immediately Saul could see! Then he went with Ananias down to the river and was baptized. After he had eaten something, his strength came back. He then decided to stay in Damascus with the believers for some time.

The Apostle Begins His Ministry

20-21. Then he went to the Jewish synagogue and told the people about Jesus, that He was the Son of God. The people were amazed and said, "Isn't this the man who arrested believers in Jerusalem and put them in jail? Didn't he come here to do the same thing?"

22. But every day the people kept

coming to hear what Saul had to say. Each day his preaching became more powerful. He showed people from the prophets that Jesus was the Messiah, and the synagogue leaders couldn't prove him wrong.

23-25. The leaders did not like Saul, and made plans to kill him. Saul heard that they were waiting for him at the city gates. So during the night the believers took him to the city wall and put him in a large basket. (Saul was a small man.) Using ropes, they lowered him to the ground.

26-27. From Damascus Saul went back to Jerusalem to make peace with the believers there. When they saw him, they were afraid and didn't believe his story that he had been converted. But Barnabas took Saul to see the apostles. He told them about Saul's conversion, and how he had boldly preached Jesus all over Damascus.

28-29. Then the apostles welcomed Saul as a true believer. He stayed with them for some time, preaching the good news about Jesus openly all over Jerusalem. He even boldly debated with the Jews. They too could not prove him wrong, so they made plans to kill him.

30. When the believers heard this, they urged Saul to leave Jerusalem to save his life. Some of them went with him as far as Caesarea. From there Saul went alone to Tarsus, where he had been born.

31. Then the believers had peace for some time. The Holy Spirit was with them, and many members were added to the church.

Peter Heals Aeneas and Dorcas

32-35. About this time Peter went to visit the believers in the city of Lydda. There he saw a paralyzed man named Aeneas, who had been in bed

for eight years. Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus has healed you. Come, get up and make your bed." Just like that, Aeneas sat up and got out of bed. Then people from all over town came to see Aeneas, and many gave their hearts to Jesus.

36-38. Not far away, in the city of Joppa, lived Dorcas. She was a believer who was always helping widows and the poor. One day she became sick and died. The believers had heard that Peter was nearby, so they sent word for him to hurry and come.

39. When he arrived, they took him upstairs to see Dorcas. The widows stood around her crying. They showed Peter clothes she had made for the poor while she was alive.

40-41. He asked all of them to leave the room, and knelt and prayed. Then he stood and said, "Dorcas, get up." She opened her eyes and sat up. He reached out his hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the widows and others to come and see what the Lord had done.

42-43. News quickly spread throughout the city, and many believed in Jesus. Peter stayed in Joppa for some time working with the believers. He stayed at the house of a leather worker named Simon.

Peter and the Roman Officer

10 Now there was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius. He was a Roman army officer and very religious. He and his family worshiped the God of Israel. He also gave much money to the poor and prayed often.

3-6. One afternoon, while he was praying, an angel appeared to him and said, "Cornelius, God has heard your prayers. He has noticed how you help the poor, and He has not forgotten

you. He wants you to send for a man named Peter. He's staying in Joppa with Simon, who works with leather. Peter will tell you more about God."

7-8. Then the angel disappeared. Cornelius called two servants and a soldier, who was also religious, and told them to saddle some horses and go to Joppa to find Peter.

9-10. About noon the next day they reached Joppa. Peter had gone up on the flat roof of Simon's house to pray. When it was time to eat, he got hungry. But suddenly he was given a vision.

11-13. He saw a big sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners. Inside the sheet were all kinds of unclean animals, such as vultures and snakes. As he looked, he heard a voice from heaven: "If you're hungry, take one of these animals, and eat."

14-16. Peter answered, "No, Lord. I have never eaten anything unclean. I can't do it now." The voice replied, "Don't call things unclean that God has made clean." This happened three times. Then the sheet was taken back to heaven, and the vision ended.

17-20. While Peter was trying to understand what this vision meant, Cornelius' men had found the house and were asking for Peter. Then the Holy Spirit said to Peter, "Three men are downstairs looking for you. Go down to meet them. They want you to go with them. Don't say 'No,' because I sent them here to find you."

21-22. So Peter went downstairs and said, "I'm Peter. Are you looking for me?" They answered, "Yes." Peter asked, "Why?" They replied, "Cornelius, the captain stationed in Caesarea, sent us to find you. He's a good man. He worships God and is highly respected by your people. Yesterday an angel told him to send for you to learn more about God."

23. Then Peter invited them to stay overnight and get some rest. Early the next morning Peter left with them, along with six men from the church.

24-26. The following day, about noon, they arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was waiting for them. His house was full of relatives and friends. When Cornelius met Peter, he fell to his knees, as if to worship him. Peter said, "Get up. I'm just a human being like you."

27-29. Then they went inside, where many people were waiting to hear what Peter would say. After he was introduced, he said, "All of you know that a Jew is not supposed to eat in the house of a Gentile. But God showed me in a vision that I should not think that some people are unclean. So when you sent for me, I came. What is it that you want to know?"

30-33. Cornelius replied, "About four days ago while I was praying, a man in a white robe surrounded by a brilliant light appeared to me in a vision. He told me that God had heard my prayers and had seen what I have done for the poor. Then he told me to send for you and that you would tell us more about God. So that's what we did."

34-35. Peter said, "Now I know for sure that God does not make a difference between people. Everyone who loves Him and does what is right He accepts into His family, no matter where they come from."

36-38. "I'm sure you have heard about Jesus, the Son of God, who is the Lord of everyone. You must have heard about all the wonderful things He did beginning in Galilee from the day He was baptized. He went everywhere, healing the sick and casting out demons."

39-40. "We went everywhere with Him and saw what He did. We also saw Him arrested and crucified. But

three days later God raised Him from the dead. He stayed with us for forty days before returning to heaven.

41-43. "He ate and drank with us and told us to share the good news of salvation with everyone. He also said to tell people that God made Him judge over both the living and the dead. Our prophets predicted all this when they said that if we accept Him as our Savior, we will be forgiven."

44-46. While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came on the people. They stood up and praised God for what He had done for them. They also began to speak in different languages. This really surprised Peter and the men with him.

47-48. Then Peter said to the believers with him, "How can we refuse to baptize people when they have received the Holy Spirit just as we did?" So all the people were baptized. Peter remained with them for some time, telling them more about Jesus.

Peter Returns to Jerusalem

11 The apostles in Jerusalem heard about Peter's experience with Cornelius and that he and his family and friends had accepted Jesus as their Savior.

2-3. So when Peter got back home, some believers asked him whether the men who had been baptized had also been circumcised. He answered, "No." They were upset because they believed that people had to keep the Jewish rites before they could become real Christians.

4-12. Then Peter told them everything that had happened, beginning with his vision on the roof in Joppa. He said that the Holy Spirit told him to go with six men to Cornelius to tell him more about God.

13-14. He also told them what

Cornelius had said about his own vision. An angel had appeared to him and told him to send for Peter, who would explain how to be saved.

15-16. Then Peter said, "So I started telling them about Jesus. In the middle of my sermon the Holy Spirit came on them the same way He came on us at Pentecost. When I and the men with me saw that, we recalled what John the Baptist had said about the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

17. "I decided that if God gave these people the Holy Spirit, who was I to tell them that they had to be circumcised before they could be considered real Christians?"

18. When the group heard that, they understood and said, "Praise the Lord! He has helped other people to repent so they too can be saved."

Saul and Barnabas

19. Many believers had left Jerusalem because of the persecution that followed the stoning of Stephen. Some of them even went to other countries. Wherever they went, they shared their faith in Jesus, but only with their fellow Jews who hadn't heard the good news.

20-21. But other believers from Cyprus went to Antioch and shared their faith with people other than Jews. The Holy Spirit was with them, and many people believed and were baptized.

22-24. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard what was happening in Antioch, they asked Barnabas to go and check things out. When he got there, he praised the Lord and encouraged the people to stay true to God and hold on to their faith.

25-26. Then he went to Tarsus to find Saul, and brought him to Antioch. For a whole year the two of them preached and taught. Many more peo-

ple were added to the church. In fact, it was at Antioch that believers were first called Christians.

27-28. Later believers from Jerusalem who had the gift of prophecy came to Antioch. One was named Agabus. Through the power of the Holy Spirit he predicted that there would be a severe drought throughout that part of the Roman Empire. He told the believers to prepare for it.

29-30. When the drought came, the members in Antioch decided to help their fellow believers in Israel as much as they could. After collecting the relief offering, they gave it to Barnabas and Saul to take to Jerusalem for distribution.

James and Peter Arrested

12 About this time young King Herod started persecuting the church. He arrested James, the brother of John, and had him executed.

3-4. When he saw how pleased the Jewish leaders were over this, he also arrested Peter. This happened at the time of the Passover. He put Peter in prison and had him guarded by four groups of four soldiers each. Herod wanted to wait until after the Passover to execute him. Then he would do it publicly.

5-6. While Peter was in his prison cell, the believers prayed day and night for God to rescue him. The night before he was to be executed, Peter was sleeping peacefully in his cell chained to two guards. Other guards were guarding the door of the cell and the entrance to the prison.

7-8. Suddenly the light of an angel filled the whole cell. The angel woke Peter up and said, "Hurry, get up!" As Peter got up, the chains fell from his wrists. The angel said, "Get dressed

and put on your sandals." Peter was still half asleep, but he obeyed. The angel reminded him, "Put on your coat. It's cold outside. Now follow me."

9-10. The cell door opened without a sound. Peter followed the angel, thinking he was dreaming as they walked past two more guards. When they reached the entrance of the prison house, the big iron gate silently opened. They passed two more guards and walked out and on down the street. The angel lit the way. Then he disappeared.

11-12. When Peter felt the cold night air, he said to himself, "This isn't a dream. God has sent an angel to set me free." He stood there for a moment, and then went as fast as he could to Mary's house, where the church members were praying for him. (Mary was the mother of Mark.)

13-14. He knocked, and a girl named Rhoda went to the door. When she heard Peter's voice outside, she got so excited that she forgot to unlock the door. She ran back to the room and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!"

15-16. "You're out of your mind," they replied. "Peter's in prison. Maybe it was his angel." But Peter kept knocking. Finally someone went and opened the door. And there stood Peter!

17-18. He put his finger to his lips for them to be quiet. He told how God had delivered him, and said, "Go tell James and the other believers that their prayers have been answered." Then he left the city.

19. As soon as it was daylight, the guards became frantic and said to each other, "Where's Peter?" Then the king ordered them to search the whole prison, but Peter was gone. Herod was so angry that he had all the guards killed.

The King Dies

20. Herod then moved from Judea to the city of Caesarea. He had a disagreement with the people of Tyre and Sidon. So they went to see him and begged him not to cut off their food supply or stop their trade. He agreed, and they went away happy.

21-22. On the festival to honor the emperor of Rome, Herod put on his royal robe and sat on his throne to address the people. He gave a tremendous speech. When he finished, the audience shouted, "This was not the voice of a man, but the voice of a god!"

23. Then an angel touched the king, and suddenly he was in terrible pain. It was so bad that he had to leave the festivities. His abdomen swelled up, and a few days later he died.

24. Meanwhile the good news about Jesus spread everywhere, and the church continued to grow.

25. After Saul and Barnabas had delivered the donations from the believers in Antioch to the apostles in Jerusalem, they went back to Antioch and took Mark with them.

Saul's First Missionary Journey

13 In the church at Antioch some had the gift of prophecy and some the gift of teaching. This included Saul and Barnabas.

2-3. One day as the members were fasting and praying, the Holy Spirit said to them, "Set apart Saul and Barnabas for mission service. I want them to do the work I have called them to do." Again the members fasted and prayed. Then they laid their hands on the men and sent them on their way.

The Island of Cyprus

4-5. The Holy Spirit directed Saul and

Barnabas to go to the large island of Cyprus. Mark volunteered to go with them, because he wanted to be a missionary. On the island they worshiped with the Jews in their synagogues and told them about Jesus.

6-7. They walked across the island to the capital city. There they met a Jew named Bar-Jesus (or Elymas in Greek) who claimed to be a prophet, but he practiced magic. He worked for the governor, who was a good man. Saul and Barnabas were not in the city very long before the governor invited them to come to the palace to tell him about Jesus.

8-9. Elymas was there too. He tried to put doubts in the governor's mind about Jesus. He accused Saul (who now went by the name of Paul) of lying and performing miracles through sorcery. Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, turned to Elymas and said,

10-11. "You're being controlled by the devil. You're against everything that's good. Quit trying to turn people away from God. The Lord has decided to stop you. You will be blind until God decides otherwise." Things began to look misty for Elymas, and soon he was totally blind. Someone had to lead him out of the room.

12. When the governor saw this, he was amazed and believed what Paul said. He accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior and became a Christian.

The Other Antioch

13-14. From Cyprus, Paul and the others took a ship to Asia Minor and walked to the city of Perga. That's when Mark decided to go home. Being a missionary was harder than he had thought. But Paul and Barnabas went on to the city of Antioch. On Sabbath they worshiped with the Jews.

15. After the Scripture reading, the

elder in charge invited Paul and Barnabas to speak words of encouragement.

16-18. Paul went to the front and said, "Men of Israel and other friends of God, listen. As you know, God chose us to be His people. He brought us out of Egypt with great power. He took care of us for forty years in the wilderness with great patience and kindness.

19-20. "Then He gave us the land of Canaan. Our people had been slaves, and we had no laws of our own. So God gave us laws and judges so we could govern ourselves. This took place over a period of more than 400 years, until the time of Samuel, the prophet.

21-23. "When our people asked for a king so they would be like other nations, God reluctantly agreed and chose Saul. Saul ruled the country for about forty years before he was killed in battle. Then God made David king because he loved the Lord with all his heart. It was from David's family that our Savior, Jesus Christ, came.

24-25. "Just before Jesus started His ministry, John the Baptist told the people to repent and to be baptized. Then Jesus came to be baptized. John told the people that Jesus was the one they were looking for. He also said he wasn't even worthy to loosen Jesus' sandals.

26. "The message of salvation God sent to us through Jesus Christ was not just for us in Jerusalem, but also for you.

27. "Sad to say, our people there did not accept Jesus as the one the prophets talked about, even though they read these prophecies every Sabbath. In one sense they made them come true by arresting Jesus and condemning Him to death.

28-29. "They took Him to Pilate, the Roman governor, and demanded that he

crucify Him. Then Jesus' body was taken down from the cross and buried.

30-31. "Three days later God raised Him from the dead. For the next forty days the men who had been with Him during His ministry from Galilee to Jerusalem saw Him. These men are living witnesses of all that has happened.

32-34. "So the good news we want to share with you is that God has kept His promise to our ancestors. David told us that God would resurrect His Son. God said, 'You are My Son in a new way, because I raised You from the dead.' Through Isaiah He said, 'I will resurrect You and give You the blessings I promised David.'

35-37. "In another place David said to God, 'I know You will not let the body of Your Son rot in the grave.' David was not talking about himself. David served our people well. When he died, he was buried, and his body did rot in the grave. But not so with Jesus. God resurrected Him.

38-39. "So I want all of you to know that Jesus conquered death, and the forgiveness of sin has been made secure. Everyone who believes that God's promise has been fulfilled in Jesus can be made right with God. The law of Moses can't do that.

40-41. "So let's be careful that we don't fulfill other things the prophets said. Through the prophet Habakkuk God said, 'Listen, you doubters, so you won't die in your sins. I will do something that will amaze you. It will be hard to believe, even when you are told about it by those who have seen it.'"

The Next Sabbath

42-43. After worship, the Gentiles begged Paul to come back the next Sabbath to preach to them again. As the people left the church, some of

them followed Paul and Barnabas. They encouraged them in their new-found faith and told them to hold on to Jesus.

44-45. The next Sabbath it seemed that the whole town came to hear Paul and Barnabas preach. When the Jewish leaders saw how popular these two men were, they became jealous. They said insulting things and argued against whatever Paul said.

46-47. Then Paul and Barnabas said to the Jewish leaders, "It was the right thing for us to bring the good news about Jesus to you first. But if you don't believe, you condemn yourselves. So we have no choice but to preach to the Gentiles so that they can be saved. This is what the Lord has told us to do."

48-49. When the Gentiles heard that, they were glad and praised God for Paul and Barnabas. Then they shared the good news about Jesus with their friends. So the word of God spread throughout that whole region.

50. But the Jewish leaders didn't give up. They told some of the religious women and the city officials that Paul and Barnabas were trouble-makers. So the city officials forced them to leave town.

51-52. As Paul and Barnabas left, they shook the dust off their feet as a sign of protest and went to the city of Iconium. But they left a lot of happy people in Antioch who were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Iconium

14 The same thing that had happened in Antioch happened in Iconium. Paul and Barnabas went to worship on the Sabbath and shared the good news about Jesus with both Jews and Gentiles. Many of them accepted Jesus and became believers.

2-4. But some of the Jews refused to believe. They stirred up the whole city against these new Christians. In spite of that, Paul and Barnabas stayed there for some time teaching about Jesus and healing many. Soon people took sides. Some were against Paul and Barnabas, and some were for them.

5-7. The Jews and the Greeks who were against the apostles finally persuaded the city officials to arrest them and have them stoned to death. When Paul and Barnabas heard the people whispering about it, they left and went to the city of Lystra to preach there.

Lystra and Derbe

8-10. In Lystra they saw a man who had been born with deformed feet and couldn't walk. He listened to everything Paul said. Paul could tell that the man wanted to be healed and believed that God could do it. So Paul looked at him and said in a commanding voice, "Stand up!" The man jumped up and could walk.

11-12. When the people saw it, they shouted, "These men are gods!" They thought that Barnabas was the god they called "Zeus" and Paul the god they called "Hermes," because he was the main speaker.

13. Then the priest in charge of the temple of Jupiter quickly prepared sacrifices of young bulls and flowers and brought them to the city gate. He planned to sacrifice the bulls, and to worship Paul and Barnabas as gods.

14-15. When the two apostles heard about this, they ran to the city gate and shouted to the people, "Stop! Don't do this! Listen!" When they finally got their attention, Paul said, "We're not gods. We're just human beings like you. We've come to tell you about the real God, the one who made heaven and earth."

16-18. "In the past, God let nations develop as they wanted to, but He always gave them evidence of His love. He sent them rain and blessed their crops, which made people happy." Paul and Barnabas hoped to get the people's attention off themselves and onto God. But they were barely able to keep the people from worshipping them.

19. Meanwhile some of the Jews from Antioch had followed Paul and Barnabas. They were able to turn the crowd against them. The people took Paul and began throwing stones at him until they thought he was dead. Then they dragged his body away from the city gate and left it.

20. Those who loved Paul gathered around him, crying. Suddenly Paul moved. Then he got up and painfully walked back to the city with them. The next day he and Barnabas left for the city of Derbe.

21-22. There they preached about Jesus, and soon many people became believers. Then Paul and Barnabas returned to the other cities to see how the new believers there were doing and to encourage them. They also warned them that they too could be misunderstood and persecuted for their faith.

23. In each city Paul and Barnabas ordained elders. After fasting and praying with them, they encouraged them to trust Jesus and help the people.

24-26. On the way home they stopped in Perga, where Mark had left them. Then they caught a ship in Attalia and sailed back to Antioch, where they had begun their ministry.

27-28 When they got there, they called the church members together and told them everything that had happened. They told how God had opened the way for many people to

hear the good news about Jesus. They stayed in Antioch for some time to rest and recover.

The Jerusalem Conference

15 Meanwhile some men from Jerusalem came to Antioch. They told the members that they could not be saved unless they were circumcised. Paul and Barnabas disagreed. Soon people were taking sides. So the members sent Paul and Barnabas, together with some of the elders, to Jerusalem to ask the advice of the apostles.

3. They left Antioch and stopped at churches along the way. They told about their first missionary journey and about those who had given their hearts to Jesus. This really made the believers happy, and they praised the Lord for what He had done.

4. When Paul and those with him reached Jerusalem, the believers and leaders welcomed them and called a special meeting. They wanted to hear about this mission trip and how the people had responded.

5. At the end of their report some priests who believed that Jesus was the Messiah stood up and said, "No one can be saved unless they are circumcised. And they must also keep all the laws and festivals that Moses gave us."

6-7. So the apostles called a general council to discuss the problem and make a decision. After a long discussion Peter stood and said, "Brothers, you remember how ten years ago God used me to take the gospel to Cornelius, the Roman officer. When he and his family learned about Jesus, they became Christians.

8-9. "God knows people's hearts, and He gave them the Holy Spirit the same way He did us at Pentecost.

Obviously God didn't care what their nationality was, but accepted them because of their faith in Him.

10-11. "Why would you burden these new believers with all the rituals that we have? We know that we're saved through Jesus, and they are saved the same way."

12. No one could argue with what Peter said. Then Paul and Barnabas told them about the miracles and the wonderful things God had done for the Gentiles.

13-14. When they finished, James, the stepbrother of Jesus, who was in charge of the meeting, said, "Brothers, listen to me. Peter just told us what happened ten years ago when the Holy Spirit came on Cornelius and his family.

15-18. "This is in harmony with what God said through the prophet Amos: 'I will bless the descendants of David. I will rebuild their city and make them strong again. People from everywhere will come, and I will accept them. I will call them by My name, and they will be Mine. This has been My plan from the beginning.'

19-20. "Therefore, it seems to me that we should not burden the Gentiles with our rituals, even though we worship the same God. We should write down a few simple rules for them to follow. They should stay away from idols, from doing the bad things the world does, and not eat meat with blood still in it.

21. "On the positive side, they should become better acquainted with the Bible, especially the writings of Moses that we read every Sabbath in church."

22. They all agreed, and decided to send two representatives to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas to deliver the letter. The two men chosen were Judah and Silas—both leaders among the believers.

23-24. The letter read: "We, the apostles and elders, send greetings to our Gentile brothers and sisters, not only to those in Antioch but everywhere. We've heard that some said you must be circumcised before you can become Christians and be saved. We want you to know that we did not send them.

25-27. "We held a general council to discuss this, and we want to let you know what we agreed on. We asked Paul and Barnabas, together with Judah and Silas, to take this letter to you and to verify that what it says is true.

28. "The Holy Spirit has told us not to require you to observe all our rituals. But we want to give you these simple rules that will help all of us live better lives for Jesus.

29. "Don't get involved in social activities associated with idol worship and eat meat that has been offered to these idols. Don't use meat from animals that have been strangled, or meat that is still filled with blood. Don't take part in the sins of the world just because others do it. If you follow these simple rules, you will do well. Blessings on all of you."

30-32. So the men took the letter to the believers in Antioch and gave it to the elders. After they read it aloud, everyone was happy that the problem had been solved. Both Judah and Silas had the gift of prophecy, and also encouraged the believers in their faith in the word of God.

33-35. The members asked them to take a letter of thanks back to the leaders in Jerusalem. Judah left with the letter, but Silas decided to stay to help Paul and Barnabas evangelize the city.

Paul's Second Missionary Journey

36-38. Sometime later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's go and visit the be-

lievers in the places where we went before, to see how they're doing." Barnabas wanted to take his young cousin Mark with them again. Paul disagreed because Mark had given up before and gone back home.

39-41. So instead Barnabas took Mark and went to the large island of Cyprus. Paul chose Silas to go to the other places with him. The members prayed that God would take care of them. So they went to encourage the new believers in all the cities where they had been before.

Timothy Joins Paul

16 Paul and Silas went to the city of Lystra, where they met young Timothy. Everything they had heard about him was good.

3. So Paul decided to take him with them. His mother was Jewish, but his father was a Greek. Since Timothy was a Christian, he didn't have to be circumcised. But Paul thought it was a good idea anyway, since he would be working with Jewish people.

4-5. From Lystra they went to visit the other cities where Paul had been, and shared with the believers what the general council in Jerusalem had decided. This encouraged the believers and strengthened their faith. And every day more people joined the church.

6-7. After visiting all the places they had planned to, Paul, Silas, and Timothy decided to go north into new territory. But the Holy Spirit told them to go west, so they did. On the way they thought they should make a loop into Bithynia. But again the Holy Spirit said, "No."

8-10. So they went straight west until they got to the city of Troas. (It was here that I, Luke, the author of Acts, joined them.) That night Paul had a

vision and saw a man from Macedonia pleading, "Come over and help us." The next morning Paul told us about the vision. Then we knew that God wanted us to take the gospel to Europe. So we sailed to Greece, as the Holy Spirit had directed us.

In Philippi

11-12. When we got to the other shore, we went to Philippi, a city that belonged to the Romans. We decided to stay there several days and share the good news about Jesus with them.

13-14. The first Sabbath we worshiped with a group of Jews by a river outside the city because they didn't have a church. One of the women was Lydia, a businesswoman from the city of Thyatira. We could tell that she loved God. So we told her about Jesus.

15. Not long afterward, she and her whole family were baptized. Then she invited us to stay at her house as long as we were in the city, which we did.

16-17. One day, as we were going to the place of prayer by the river, a slave girl followed us. She was controlled by demons and earned a lot of money for her owners by fortune-telling. That day she kept shouting, "These men are sent by the Most High God to tell us how to be saved!"

18. She did this day after day, until people thought she was one of us. So one day Paul looked at her and commanded the demon, "In the name of Jesus, come out of her and leave her alone!" Immediately the demon left her, and she was a free girl. Then she also accepted Jesus and became a believer.

Paul and Silas in Prison

19-21. When the owners of the girl saw what had happened, they realized that they couldn't use her to make

money for them anymore. So they grabbed Paul and Silas and took them to the courthouse. They accused the two men of disturbing the peace and trying to convert people to the Jewish religion, which was against the law.

22-24. Soon a crowd gathered and accused Paul and Silas of the same thing. So the city officials ordered them stripped to the waist and whipped. Then they asked the officers to put them in jail until morning. The jailer was told to guard them well so they wouldn't escape. He decided to put their ankles between blocks of wood that had holes for their feet.

25-26. During the night Paul and Silas praised the Lord for giving them strength to suffer for Him. They prayed and sang. Then they shared the good news about Jesus with the other prisoners. At midnight there was a big earthquake. The whole prison shook, and the doors flew open. And suddenly everyone's chains fell off.

27-28. The jailer woke up, saw the prison doors open, and thought all the prisoners had escaped. He pulled out his sword to kill himself. Paul shouted, "Don't do that! We're all here!"

29-30. The jailer called for a torch and went to take a look. When he saw that all the prisoners were still there, he couldn't believe it. He fell on his knees and asked Paul and Silas to forgive him for treating them so harshly. He then brought them outside and said, "What must I do to be saved?"

31-33. Paul said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. So will your family if they believe." Then he told him and his family the story of Jesus. After the warden washed their wounds, he and his family went with Paul and Silas to the courtyard pool and were baptized.

34. Then the jailer took them back to

his house and gave them a good meal. The whole family was happy in their new faith.

35-36. The next morning police officers were sent to the jail to release Paul and Silas. The jailer took them to the missionaries and said, "These officers are here to let you go."

37. Paul said to the officers, "The city officials ordered us whipped in public without a trial, which is against the law. Now he wants us to quietly leave town, as if nothing had happened. Let him and the other judges come and admit that they made a mistake, because we are Roman citizens and are innocent of the charges brought against us. Then we'll go."

38-39. The officers left, and told the city officials what Paul said. When they heard that these men were Roman citizens, they got worried. So they went to the prison and apologized. They asked Paul and Silas to quietly leave town, which they did.

40. But first they went to Lydia's house and stayed for a couple of days to encourage the new believers in their faith. Then they left.

In Thessalonica

17 Paul and Silas passed through a couple of other towns and made their way to the city of Thessalonica. Each Sabbath they worshiped with the Jews. They showed them from the prophecies in the Bible that the Messiah had to come and die, be buried, and rise from the dead. That proved that Jesus was the Messiah.

4. Some of the Jews and many Greeks who worshiped with them, including some important women, were convinced. They were happy to become believers and go with Paul and Silas.

5. The Jews who didn't believe

became jealous and were upset over losing so many members. So they gathered a mob, and soon the whole town was in an uproar. They even broke into the house next to the church looking for Paul.

6-7. When they didn't find him, they grabbed Jason, the owner, and dragged him and some of the new believers to the city officials. They shouted, "These Jews cause trouble no matter where they live. Now it's here! This man, Jason, has people staying at this house who are telling everyone about another king called Jesus."

8-9. When the city officials heard that, they charged Jason and the others with disturbing the peace and ordered them to pay a fine. Then they let them go.

In Berea

10. That same night the believers asked Paul and Silas to leave town to avoid being arrested. So they left for Berea. They worshiped with the Jews there as they had in other places.

11-12. In Berea the Jews were more open-minded than in other cities. They eagerly listened to Paul and Silas. Every day they studied the Scriptures to see if what these men said was true. As a result, many of them believed, including some very important Greek men and women.

13-14. When the Jews in Thessalonica heard that Paul and Silas were in Berea, they went there to start a riot against them. So the believers asked Paul to leave, but they sent some men with him for protection. Silas and Timothy decided to stay in Berea.

15. When Paul and the men with him reached the coast, they caught a ship to Athens. The Bereans wanted to stay with Paul, but he sent them back with a message that Silas and Timothy

should come and join him in Athens as quickly as they could.

In Athens

16-17. While Paul waited for Silas and Timothy, he walked through the streets. Everywhere he went he saw statues of gods. As usual, he went to worship with the Jews and told them about Jesus. He also preached in the public square.

18. One day Greek philosophers were listening to Paul. Some asked, "What is he talking about?" Others said, "He's talking about a god we've never heard of." So they asked him how someone dead could be resurrected, which was a new, strange thought to them.

19-21. They took Paul to the big temple on Mars' Hill, where the city fathers were meeting. They said, "Tell us about this man called Jesus and the resurrection. We don't understand." It seemed that everyone in Athens and others spent all their time listening to new ideas.

22-24. Paul said to the city fathers, "Your city is very religious. I see altars and statues of gods everywhere I go. But I saw one altar with a sign 'TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.' Since you already worship this God, I want to tell you about Him, the one who made this world and everything in it. He doesn't need people to build Him a temple.

25-26. "He doesn't need the things people usually bring to gods, because He owns everything. In fact, He gives us life and breath and everything else we need. He created us, which makes all of us brothers. And when the first people multiplied, He decided where they should live.

27-28. "He did this because He wants people to worship Him in their hearts, not only in front of an altar or in a temple. He's not far from any one of us.

This is the same idea your own poets had when they wrote about your god Zeus. They said, 'In him we live and move and have our being. So we are his children.'

29-31. "But we are the children of the God in heaven. So let's not think we can make an image of silver or gold to look like Him. In the past He overlooked our foolishness, but now He expects everyone to listen and to change. The day is coming when He will judge the whole world by the man called Jesus, whom He has raised from the dead."

32. When Paul started talking about Jesus' resurrection, the city fathers stopped him, because they had a hard time accepting the idea of a resurrection. They said to Paul, "You may go now. We'll listen to you some other time."

33-34. So Paul returned to the city. A few people followed him, and when they heard more about Jesus, they became believers. One man was a member of the city council, and there was a woman official by the name of Damaris, and some others.

In Corinth

18 Then Paul left Athens and went to the city of Corinth. There he met Aquila and his wife, Priscilla. They were in the tent-making business. Paul knew how to make tents, so they gave him a job and invited him to stay with them. Every Sabbath they would worship with the Jews, and Paul would tell them about Jesus.

5. Finally Silas and Timothy caught up with Paul. He was glad to see them, and they all went to the synagogue together. This gave Paul courage, and he showed the people from the Scriptures that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

6. But many Jews refused to believe. They accused Paul of making a man into God. Paul said, "If that's how you feel, you're responsible for your own decision. From now on I'll preach to the Gentiles."

7-8. Then Justus, a Greek church member, invited Paul to come next door and preach in his house. A Jew named Crispus, and his family, became believers. It wasn't long before many people in the city of Corinth were coming to hear Paul and giving their hearts to Jesus.

9-11. One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and said, "Don't be afraid to stay in this city. I'll help you, because there are a lot of good people here." So Paul stayed there for a year and a half preaching and teaching the word of God.

12-13. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the people against Paul, as they had done in other places. They grabbed Paul and took him to the courthouse. When the governor came out, they said, "This fellow is trying to convert people from our religion to his, which is against the law."

14-16. Paul was about to defend himself when the governor said to the Jewish leaders, "If this man had committed a crime, I would gladly listen. But if it's a question about religion, you settle things yourselves." Then he dismissed them.

17. The crowd suddenly turned on the Jewish leaders and took hold of their spokesman and beat him right in front of the courthouse. But the governor didn't care.

Paul Returns Home

18. Sometime later Paul left and sailed toward Palestine. Aquila and Priscilla went with him. On the way he rededicated himself to God. So, as

a good Jew, he cut off some of his hair to take to Jerusalem to burn on the altar along with his sacrifice.

19-21. When the ship docked at Ephesus, they got off. Aquila and Priscilla stayed in Ephesus, but Paul waited for the next ship. While he waited, he worshiped with the Jews and told them about Jesus. They asked him to stay longer, but he couldn't. Before he left, he said, "If it's God's will, I'll be back." Then he boarded a ship going to Palestine.

22-23. The next stop was Caesarea. Paul got off and walked the rest of the way to Jerusalem. He completed his vow, talked with the church leaders, and then headed north to Antioch. He stayed there for some time to rest up. After he was tested, he decided to go back to the places he had been to encourage the new believers.

Apollos in Ephesus

24-25. About this time a Jew named Apollos, who knew the Scriptures well, came to Ephesus. He had heard something about Jesus from John the Baptist and believed what he had heard. So he preached what he knew—that people should repent and be baptized.

26. His preaching was powerful. So Aquila and Priscilla invited him home to dinner and told him more about Jesus and God's plan of salvation. This helped him to understand things better.

27. Then he decided to go to other cities and preach the good news. So the believers gave him a letter of recommendation saying that he was trustworthy and that the churches should welcome him. He was a tremendous help to the new believers wherever he went.

28. He was not afraid to preach to the Jews, showing them from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

Paul Goes Back to Ephesus

19 While Apollos was preaching in Corinth, Paul returned to Ephesus, as he had promised. When they introduced him to the newest believers, he said to them,

2-3. "When you were baptized, did you receive the Holy Spirit?" They said, "No, no one said anything to us about the Holy Spirit." Paul said, "Weren't you baptized also in the name of the Holy Spirit?" They said, "We were just told to repent, as John the Baptist told the people, and then we were baptized."

4. Paul said, "John not only baptized people but also told them that Jesus was the Lamb of God. And when Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit came on Him right there."

5-7. Paul made sure that they understood; then he rebaptized them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He prayed, and the Holy Spirit came on them, just as He had on the disciples at Pentecost. Twelve of them could now speak different languages and preach.

8-9. For the next three months Paul preached as boldly as ever, doing his best to persuade people to believe in Jesus. As usual, some believed, and some did not. Those who did not started spreading rumors about the way Christians lived. So Paul stopped preaching in the synagogue and held classes in a school.

10. This went on for two years, until almost everyone in Ephesus and the surrounding area had heard about Jesus.

Believers Burn Magic Books

11-12. God also helped Paul work miracles to show people the power of the gospel. They would take to a sick person handkerchiefs or aprons that

Paul had used, and the sick person would be healed, even one who was devil-possessed.

13. About this time some men came to Ephesus claiming to have power to heal and to cast out demons. When they saw how Paul did it, they thought that all they had to do was to say to the demons, "In the name of Jesus, come out," and that would be it.

14-16. Seven brothers decided to do what Paul had done. Their father was a Jewish priest. When they used the name of Jesus to heal a man, the demon in him said, "I know Jesus and I know Paul, but who are you?" Then the demons attacked the brothers. All seven men ran out of the house, bleeding and half naked.

17-19. Word of what had happened got around, and from then on people really respected the name of Jesus. Believers who were still playing with magic, trying to talk to their dead loved ones, stopped doing it. They took all their books about magic to the public square and burned them. These books had cost about 50,000 pieces of silver.

20. So the good news about Jesus kept spreading and growing in power, converting many people.

Paul Faces a Riot

21-22. After all this, Paul decided to visit Macedonia and southern Greece again before returning to Jerusalem. He also wanted to go to Rome and Spain. So he sent his assistants, Timothy and Erastus, ahead while he finished his work in Ephesus.

23-24. Suddenly the whole city seemed to explode with violence against the gospel and against Paul. It started with Demetrius, who was losing business making miniature silver temples of their goddess Diana.

25-26. He called the other business-

men together and said, "We've had a good business. But ever since Paul came to town, people don't buy these little temples anymore, because he tells them that there is no such goddess as Diana. Many people here and elsewhere believe him.

27-28. "Not many tourists are coming to visit her temple. So what's going to happen to our city? Many think that Diana isn't important, and they're not worshiping her anymore." When these businessmen heard that, they grew very angry and shouted, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

29-31. Soon the whole town was in an uproar. The crowd grabbed two Greek believers who had been with Paul and took them to the sports stadium. Paul wanted to rush in and talk to the crowd, but the members wouldn't let him, because he might get killed. Also some high-ranking officials who liked Paul sent him a message telling him to stay away.

32. By the time the crowd reached the stadium, there was total confusion. Some people were shouting one thing, and others were shouting something else. Some didn't even know what it was all about.

33-34. The Jews pushed a man named Alexander to the front to speak for them. He quieted the crowd. But when the people heard that he came to defend his own religion, they shouted, "Great is Diana! Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" They kept this up for two hours.

35-36. Finally the city clerk came and quieted them down. He said to the crowd, "People, listen to me. Everyone knows about our great mother Diana, and that her temple is here. They know that her statue fell from heaven as a gift to us. So calm down before you do something rash and give our city a bad name.

37. "You brought these two Greek men into the stadium for a public trial when they haven't done anything wrong. They didn't rob anyone or hurt anybody. They haven't defiled our temple, taken anything from it, or said anything bad about Diana.

38-39. "We have courts of law. If the businessmen have a complaint, they can take it to our judges on regular court days. If any of you have personal complaints, they can be settled in the same way.

40. "What you've done today looks more like a riot than a public complaint. In fact, the Roman government might still ask us for an explanation of what happened here today."

41. After he finished speaking, he dismissed the crowd, and the people went home.

Paul Leaves Ephesus

20 When the city was back to normal, Paul called the Ephesian believers together. He encouraged them to keep up the good work in Ephesus and told them goodbye. He returned first to Macedonia, then Greece, encouraging believers all along the way to Corinth in southern Greece.

3. Paul stayed in Corinth for three months. As he was making plans to sail back home, he heard that some Jews were planning to kill him before he boarded ship. So he decided to catch a ship from another port.

4-6. Some men from the various churches decided to go with Paul and sailed on ahead to meet us at Troas. We walked slowly, and when we arrived at Philippi we stayed there to observe the Passover. After about a week we caught a ship to Troas and met the rest of the group.

A Young Man in the Window

7. We decided to stay in Troas for a few days to rest. Sabbath evening the believers got together to say goodbye to Paul. Because he was planning to leave Sunday morning, he talked with us till midnight.

8-9. The upper floor of the house where we met was lit by torches, so it was very hot. To catch a cool night breeze, a young man named Eutychus sat in the open window. As he was listening to Paul he fell asleep, lost his balance, and fell three stories to the ground. The believers rushed down to help him, but he was dead.

10. Paul too rushed down to help. He knelt by the young man's body, hugged him, and earnestly prayed. Then he got up and said, "Don't worry. He's alive." When the believers saw this, they praised the Lord.

11-12. Then they went back upstairs and continued their meeting until morning. As it began to dawn, Paul said goodbye, and the family took the young man home, praising God that their son was alive and well.

The Ephesian Elders

13-16. We boarded a ship and headed for Assos. Paul decided to make the short trip by foot. When he met us, he came on board, and we sailed toward home, passing several ports along the way, including Ephesus. We wanted to get to Jerusalem in time for Pentecost.

17-19. From Miletus Paul sent a message to the Ephesian elders to come and meet him. When they came, he said to them, "You remember the life that I lived in Ephesus. I went through some hard times. My own people tried to kill me. But I preached with humility and shed many tears over the hardness of men's hearts.

20-21. "But I didn't hold back anything

that would help you. What I told you in your homes I also preached publicly. I made no difference between people. I told everyone the same thing, that they needed to repent, turn to God, and believe in Jesus.

22-24. "Now the Holy Spirit has told me to go to Jerusalem. I don't know what will happen when I get there. But the Holy Spirit has indicated that I will be arrested and put in prison. I'm not really worried, because my life doesn't mean that much to me. The only thing that really matters is to work for Jesus as long as I live.

25-27. "I want you to know how much you have meant to me since we first met. I'm afraid we won't see each other again. But I want to say, in front of all of you, that I'm not responsible for members who turn away from Jesus and are lost. I've told them everything they need to know to be saved. I held nothing back.

28. "But watch out for yourselves and for the church members. They're your sheep, and you're their shepherds, chosen by the Holy Spirit. These sheep belong to the Lord. He bought them with His own blood.

29-30. "I know that after I leave, wolves will come in and attack the sheep. There are men who teach things that are not from the Scriptures. Some will always believe what such men say and will follow them.

31-32. "So stay alert, and remember that for three years I have taught you what was right, often with tears in my eyes. I commit you to the care of God and to the grace and power of His word. The Scriptures will help you to become spiritually strong. One day Jesus will give you your inheritance, as He will to everyone who believes in Him.

33-34. "I have never wanted anyone's money, clothes, or a life of ease. You

know how hard I worked making tents to support myself and those who were with me.

35. "I have given you an example of what it means to love Jesus. You should be willing to work as I did and help those who are weak. Remember what Jesus said: 'It is better to give than to receive.'"

36-38. When Paul finished, we all knelt on the beach. He prayed for each of the elders and committed them to the Lord. When we stood up, we were all crying, because Paul had said that he might not see them again. Then Paul gave the elders one last hug, and we all walked to the ship together.

In Caesarea

21 After we had said goodbye to the Ephesian elders, we sailed toward Palestine. We had to change ships several times before reaching Tyre. That's where the ship had to unload its cargo. So we decided to go ashore.

4-6. We found some believers there and stayed with them about a week. They were impressed by the Holy Spirit to warn Paul not to go to Jerusalem. When we left, all of them—men, women, and children—walked with us to the ship. We knelt on the beach to pray, and then said goodbye before boarding another ship.

7-9. From Tyre we sailed south, made an overnight stop, and visited with believers there. Then we sailed to Caesarea, where we stayed at the home of Philip, one of the original seven deacons. His four unmarried daughters all had the gift of prophecy.

10-11. Also a prophet from Jerusalem named Agabus came by. When he met Paul, he took Paul's belt, wrapped it around his own feet and hands, and said, "The Jews in Jerusalem will tie

the hands and feet of the man who owns this belt and turn him over to the Romans to die."

12-14. When we heard this, we begged Paul not to go. Paul said, "Why are you crying? Are you trying to break my heart? This message is from the Holy Spirit. I thank Him for telling me what to expect. I love Jesus, and I'm willing to die for Him." When we couldn't change his mind, we said, "We pray that the Lord's will be done."

15-16. So we headed for Jerusalem, and some believers went with us. The first night we stayed with a man who had been converted in Cyprus and had come to live in Palestine.

Paul in Jerusalem

17-19. The next day we arrived in Jerusalem. The believers were thrilled to see us. The following day we went to see James, who was in charge of the church. A number of other church leaders were there too. Paul gave them a report of what God had done through him for so many non-Jewish people.

20. They praised the Lord and told Paul about the thousands of Jews who had become believers. "These new converts," they said, "still think it's important to keep the Jewish rituals."

21-22. "But they've heard that you've been telling converted Jews to stop keeping these rituals. When they hear that you're in town, they'll want to have a meeting with you. We're worried about this."

23. "Here's our suggestion. We have four poor believers who have rededicated themselves to God as you have. They have one more week of fasting and prayer to go. We would like you to be their sponsor."

24. "All that you have to do is to pay for their sacrifices and to have their

heads shaved. Then make sure the priest burns their hair on the altar with their sacrifice. This way our Jewish believers can see for themselves that you're not against our rituals."

25. "But as for the Gentile believers, all we asked them to do is to stay away from pagan practices, not to eat meat filled with blood, and not to do the bad things the world does."

26. Paul agreed. So the next day he took the four men to the Temple, told the priest that they had only one week left to complete their vow, and made an appointment for them to have their hair cut.

Paul Arrested

27-28. Near the end of that week some Jews from Asia came into the Temple and saw him. They grabbed him and shouted, "Help! This man preaches against Moses wherever he goes! He's brought foreigners into the part of the Temple that's reserved for Jews! He's made it unclean!"

29. (Earlier that week they had seen Paul on the street talking to Gentile believers, and thought he had brought them into the Temple with him.)

30. All the people in Jerusalem became very upset. They came running from everywhere and dragged Paul out of the Temple. Then they closed the doors.

31-33. They started beating Paul and would have killed him. But the Roman commander heard there was trouble at the Temple. So he took his troops and stopped the beating. He helped Paul to his feet and arrested him.

34. Then he demanded to know what the problem was. Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another. He couldn't make out what was being said. So he decided to take Paul back to the fort to find out for himself. The

crowd followed, shouting against Paul all the way.

35-36. When they reached the steps going up into the fort, the guards had to carry Paul on their shoulders to keep the mob from getting to him. The crowd tried to grab Paul, and screamed, "Kill him! Kill him!"

37-39. Just before they reached the top of the stairs Paul asked for permission to speak to the crowd. The commander was surprised that Paul could speak Greek. He said, "Then you aren't the Egyptian who operates a camp with 4,000 terrorists?" Paul replied, "No, I'm a Jew born in Tarsus. I'm not a terrorist. Please let me speak to the people."

40. The commander gave him permission. So Paul motioned to the crowd to be quiet and listen. They finally calmed down, and he spoke to them in their own language.

Paul Talks to the Crowd

22 Paul said, "Brothers, listen to what I have to say." When the people heard him speak in their own language, they became very quiet. Paul said, "I'm a fellow Jew, born in Tarsus and educated right here in Jerusalem. I was taught all the laws of Moses. I was very zealous for God, just as you are."

4-5. "I was a member of the Jewish high council and persecuted the followers of Jesus. I had them arrested and thrown in jail, and demanded their execution. The high priest and the council knows that I'm telling the truth. In fact, they gave me permission to go to Damascus and bring these people back here to be punished."

6-8. "As we neared Damascus a bright light flashed down from heaven and surrounded me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say, 'Saul, Saul, why

are you persecuting Me?' I asked, 'Lord, who are You?' The voice answered, 'I'm Jesus, the one you're persecuting.'

9-11. "The men who were with me saw the light and heard the voice, but they didn't understand what was said. Then I asked, 'Lord, what do You want me to do?' He said, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and you'll be told what to do.' Then the light disappeared. When I got up, I was blind. My friends had to lead me into the city."

12-13. "In Damascus was a man named Ananias, who kept the laws of Moses. He was highly respected by all the Jews there. He came to see me, put his hands on my head, and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight. Open your eyes, and you'll be able to see again.' I did, and I could see!"

14-16. "Then Ananias said, 'God has chosen you to do a special work for Him. He sent Jesus to see you so you could talk to Him yourself. He wants you to tell everyone about Him. So what are you waiting for? Come and be baptized and wash your sins away, and the Lord will save you.'

17-18. "Three years later I came back to Jerusalem. As I was praying in the Temple I was given a vision. I saw Jesus, and He said to me, 'Hurry! Leave Jerusalem now! I don't want you to stay here, because people won't accept you.'

19-21. "I answered, 'Lord, but people here know that I believe in Moses and that I persecuted those who said You were the Messiah. I approved of Stephen's death, and even held the coats of the men who were killing him! But now I'm changed. I can convince people that You are the Messiah.' The Lord said, 'I want you to take the good news of salvation to the Gentiles.'"

22-23. Up to this point the crowd had

really listened. But when Paul talked about taking the good news of salvation to the Gentiles, they shouted, "Kill him! Kill him!" They shouted and tore their clothes, and threw dust in the air to show how they hated Paul.

Paul's Citizenship Saves Him

24-25. When the commander saw this, he ordered the guards to take Paul inside and whip him until he told them why the Jews hated him so. As they were ready to whip him, Paul said to the officer in charge, "Do you have a right to whip a Roman citizen before he's been found guilty?"

26. When the officer heard that, he ordered the guards to stand by and wait. Then he went to the commander and said, "Sir, this man claims to be a Roman citizen. We need to be careful what we do to him."

27-28. The commander went to Paul and said, "Are you a Roman citizen?" Paul answered, "Yes, I am." The commander said, "I paid a lot of money to become a Roman citizen." Paul said, "I was born a citizen."

29. Then the guards backed off, and the commander was worried, because he had put Paul in chains before giving him a trial.

30. So he ordered the guards to take the chains off, but to keep Paul locked up until he could find out what the riot was all about. The next day he ordered the Jewish council to call a special meeting so that Paul could defend himself.

Paul Defends Himself

23 When Paul stood before the council, he said, "Brothers, I have lived for God with a clean conscience all my life."

2-3. The high priest ordered the guard to slap Paul across the mouth for say-

ing that. Then Paul said to the high priest, "God will punish you for ordering that. How dare you teach the law and then turn around and break it? Moses said that it's wrong to punish someone before he's found guilty."

4-5. Those nearby said to Paul, "You have just insulted the high priest!" Paul said, "I'm sorry. I didn't know he was the high priest. Moses told us never to say bad things about our spiritual leaders."

6-8. Paul noticed that some of the group (Pharisees) believed in the resurrection, and some (Sadducees) did not. So he said, "I'm on trial because I believe in the resurrection." Then the members started arguing. One group said, "There is no such thing as a resurrection, and there are no angels." The other group said, "Yes, there is!"

9. Soon they began shouting at each other. Then the Pharisees said, "We find nothing wrong with Paul. Maybe an angel did speak to him on the road to Damascus. If so, let's not fight against God."

10. Each group grabbed Paul and tried to pull him away from the other group. When the commander saw that, he was afraid they would pull Paul apart. So he ordered his troops to break it up and take Paul back to the fort.

The Plot to Kill Paul

11. That night the Lord appeared to Paul and said, "Don't be afraid. You've told the people in Jerusalem about Me. I will not let them hurt you, because I want you to do the same thing in Rome."

12-15. The next day some young Jewish men took an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. They went to the leading priests and said, "If

you ask the commander to bring Paul before the council one more time, we will break through the Roman guard and kill Paul for you."

16-17. Paul's nephew overheard some people on the street talking about this. So he went to the fort and told Paul. When Paul heard it, he said to the officer, "Take the boy to the commander. He has a message for him."

18-19. The officer took the boy to the commander and said, "This young man has a message for you." The commander led him to a place where they could be alone. "Now, what do you want to tell me?"

20-21. The boy said, "I heard people on the street whispering about a plan to kill Paul. They will ask you to bring Paul to the council one more time, but don't do it. Forty young men have taken an oath to break through the guards to kill Paul."

22. The commander said, "Don't tell anyone that you were here. I really appreciate your coming to tell me. You may go now."

23-24. Then he called in his officers and asked them to get 200 soldiers, seventy horsemen, and 200 men with spears ready to leave for Caesarea by nine o'clock that night. He also told them to get an extra horse for Paul.

25-27. Then he sat down and wrote the governor a letter. He said, "Dear Governor Felix: A few days ago there was a riot in the Temple. The Jews got hold of a man named Paul and were about to kill him. When I found out that he was a Roman citizen, I sent my men down to rescue him."

28-29. "I wanted to find out what the problem was, so I asked the Jews to call a council meeting and let Paul defend himself. I found out that he had not committed a crime, but it all had to do with their religious laws."

30. "This afternoon I was told of a plot to have me bring him to the council again, and forty young men would break through the guards and kill him. That's why I'm sending him to you. I told the Jews they would have to tell you what they really have against him, because Paul is a Roman citizen. Sincerely, Commander Claudius."

31-32. That night the troops left with Paul, and by morning they had gone about halfway. The foot soldiers rested, and then returned to Jerusalem. But the horsemen went on to Caesarea.

33-35. There they handed Paul over to the governor. He read the letter, and asked Paul where he was from. When he learned that Paul was a Roman citizen from Tarsus, he said, "You'll be safe here. I'll have your accusers bring their charges against you to me." Then he ordered Paul to be kept under guard at the palace.

Paul Before the Governor

24 About five days later the high priest, some older Jewish leaders, and their lawyer came to see the governor. He ordered the guards to bring Paul in, and the trial began.

24. The governor asked the Jewish lawyer what the charges were. He responded, "Your Excellency, you have helped our people enjoy peace. We appreciate the many wrongs you have made right under your leadership, and are deeply grateful that you're our governor. I don't want to take too much of your time, but please listen to our charges."

5-6. "This man is dangerous. He's nothing but a troublemaker. He stirs things up wherever he goes. He's done this all over the empire. He's a ringleader of people who call them-

selves Christians. He tried to make our Temple unclean, so we arrested him. We planned to try him according to our law.

7-9. "But the Roman commander told us to bring our charges against him to you. If you question him, you will find that these charges are true." When he finished speaking, the rest of the delegation agreed.

10. The governor motioned for Paul to speak. Paul said, "Your Excellency, over the years you've heard a number of cases involving Jews. I'll gladly defend myself.

11-13. "About twelve days ago I went to Jerusalem to worship. The Jews did not find me arguing in the Temple or stirring up the people. I did not defile their Temple. They have no proof to support such charges.

14-16. "But I must admit to one thing. I do worship God in a way that the Jews do not approve. I believe what Moses and the prophets said about the Messiah. I believe in the resurrection of the dead, as many of them do. And I try my best to do what's right.

17-18. "After being away from my country for several years, I decided to come back to worship and to see what I could do to help the poor. I had brought some donations from Jews and others in different parts of the Roman Empire.

19. "While I was in the Temple to offer sacrifices, some Jews visiting Jerusalem saw me. They grabbed me and started a riot. They are the ones who should be bringing charges against me.

20-21. "Or ask these men what crime I was guilty of when I was tried by the council. The only thing they can charge against me is saying that I believe that people will be raised from the dead."

22-23. When Paul finished, the gover-

nor, who knew about Christians, decided to end the court session. He said to everyone, "I'll investigate the matter more carefully when the commander comes; then I'll decide." He kept Paul under guard at the palace, but allowed his friends to come and see him.

24-25. A few days later the governor and his wife sent for Paul to question him privately. Paul talked to them about Jesus, about doing what's right, and about the day of judgment. When the governor heard about the day of God's judgment, he said, "You may go now, Paul. When I have more time, I'll call for you."

26-27. The governor called for Paul several times, hoping that Paul would offer him money to be set free. But Paul didn't. So the governor kept him in prison, knowing it would please the Jews. This went on for two years until the new governor took over.

Paul Before the New Governor

25 Three days after Festus became governor he visited Jerusalem. The high priest and some other leaders told him about the charges they had against Paul. They also asked him to bring Paul to Jerusalem to stand trial, because the charges against him were religious. Their actual plan was to have Paul killed along the way.

4-5. The governor said, "Since Paul is a Roman citizen, I'll have to judge him myself. But some of your leaders should go with me to Caesarea for the trial. Then they can accuse him."

6-7. About ten days later the governor left Jerusalem, and the Jews went with him. The day after they arrived in Caesarea, the governor opened court and took his seat as judge. The Jews accused Paul of all sorts of

things, but couldn't prove everything.

8-9. Paul defended himself and finished by saying, "I have done nothing against the Jewish law, the Temple, or the Roman emperor." But Festus wanted to please the Jews, so he said to Paul, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem to stand trial?"

10. Paul said, "I've already been tried by them, and they could not prove their charges against me. Therefore I appeal my case to the emperor's court. I've done nothing against the Jews.

11. "If I had committed a crime that deserved the death penalty, I would not shrink from dying. But all these accusations are false. There is no guarantee that I'll get a fair trial in Jerusalem. So I'm appealing my case to the emperor."

12. The governor talked with his advisers and then said to Paul, "You appealed to the emperor; to the emperor you will go." Then he dismissed the court.

Paul Before King Agrippa

13-14. Not long afterward, King Agrippa, who ruled one of the territories, came to congratulate the new governor. While he and his wife were there, Festus told them about Paul.

15-16. He said, "One of the first things I decided to do after becoming governor was to visit Jerusalem. The priests wanted me to take Paul there for trial. I told them that he was a Roman citizen and had a perfect right to defend himself. Then I invited them to come to Caesarea with me.

17-19. "When I left Jerusalem, they came with me to have the trial here. They didn't accuse him of a crime, but rather something about their religion. It had to do with a man called Jesus, who was crucified and, according to Paul, rose from the dead.

20-21. "Since I don't know that much about their religion, I asked Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem to defend himself. But he appealed his case to the emperor's court in Rome. So I ordered that he be taken there."

22-23. Agrippa said, "I'd like to hear the man." The governor replied, "I'll set it up for tomorrow." So the next day they came with generals and city officials to hear what Paul had to say. They ordered the guards to bring Paul in.

24. The governor said to his guests, "King Agrippa, and all others of rank, this is the man the Jews accuse of crimes against their Temple. They have pleaded with me, both in Jerusalem and here, to have him executed.

25. "However, when I examined him, I found nothing that would call for the death penalty. Because he's a Roman citizen and has appealed his case to the emperor's court in Rome, I have decided to send him there.

26-27. "I have nothing to charge him with. So I bring him before you to hopefully help me find something to put in my letter. I can't send him to Rome without telling the emperor what the charges are."

Paul Gives His Testimony

26 After the governor sat down, Agrippa turned to Paul and said, "You may speak to defend yourself." Paul raised his hand and said, "King Agrippa, I consider it a privilege to defend myself in your presence. I'm happy to talk to you, because you know the Jewish customs and religion. So I beg you to be patient as you listen to me.

4-5. "The Jews know where I grew up and that I received my education in Jerusalem. Because I was a strict Pharisee, they know how careful I was

to keep all the laws and rituals of the Jewish people.

6-8. "Now I'm being tried because I have put my hope in the promise that God gave to our people about the Messiah. The Jews keep looking forward to His coming. I believe that He has already come and has been raised from the dead. This is the difference between us. Why should it be impossible for God to raise the dead?"

9. "At one time I was determined to rid the whole country of those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah and that He had been raised from the dead."

10-11. "The priests gave me permission to arrest people all over Jerusalem and throw them into prison. Some were even put to death. This happened more than once. I had other believers whipped right in our own synagogues, trying to make them turn against Jesus. Then I went to other cities to find them and do the same thing."

12-14. "The leading priests then sent me to Damascus. About noon, just before we got there, suddenly a light brighter than the sun beamed down from heaven, and all of us fell to the ground. Then I heard a voice saying to me in my language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' I asked, 'Who are You, Lord?'"

15-18. "The voice replied, 'I am Jesus. Stand up. I want you to tell others that you've seen Me. I also want you to tell them things that I will show you later. I will be with you and help you. I want you to lead the Jews and others out of darkness and back to God. Then God will forgive them, and they will truly be My people because of their faith in Me.'"

19-20. "King Agrippa, since then I have not disobeyed that vision. I have preached the good news of salvation in Jerusalem, Damascus, and many parts of the Roman Empire. Every-

where I've been I've urged people to repent and change their way of life."

21-22. "This is why the Jews seized me in the Temple and tried to kill me. But to this day God has protected me. That's the only reason I'm alive today and can share the good news with you and all the others who are here. What I told you about Jesus is nothing new. Moses and the prophets told us that a long time ago."

23. "They said that the Messiah would come and die and then be resurrected. It's through Him that God offers eternal life as a free gift to all who believe. The prophets also said that the good news will go to all the world, to everyone alike."

Paul Makes an Appeal

24-25. The governor interrupted Paul. "Paul, you're beside yourself! Too much studying has affected your mind." Paul replied, "Most Excellent Festus, I'm not out of my mind. What I'm telling you is the truth."

26-27. "King Agrippa knows what I'm talking about. That's why I'm speaking so openly. You've heard about Jesus, because He never tried to hide what He did. Do you believe what the prophets wrote? I know you do."

28-29. The king's heart was touched. He said, "Paul, you almost persuade me to be a Christian." Paul said, "King Agrippa, I wish that you and everyone here would become a Christian as I am, except for these chains!"

30-32. Then the king stood up, showing that the meeting was over, and he left the room. All the others followed him. Once outside, the king and the governor talked and agreed that Paul was not a criminal deserving death. Agrippa said to the governor, "Paul could have been set free if he had not appealed his case to the emperor's court."

Paul Sent to Rome

27 Soon a date was set for Paul and some other prisoners to be taken to Rome. We were allowed to go with him. A Roman officer named Julius was put in charge.

2. We boarded a ship going toward Rome, making several stops along the way. One other believer who had been with Paul in Thessalonica and Ephesus went with us.

3-5. We left Caesarea and sailed north to Sidon. There the officer let Paul off to visit some of his friends and receive care. Then we sailed around the island of Cyprus and landed in Myra.

6-8. There we were transferred to a ship going to Italy. We stopped at another port to take on supplies. Then we sailed along the southern coast of Crete until we came to place named Fair Havens.

9-10. The ship stayed there a long time. By then it was getting dangerous to sail west, because of the shifting winter winds. Paul warned, "We're taking a risk to sail now. This time of year there could be some bad storms. We could lose the ship, the cargo, and even our lives!"

11-13. The captain and the ship's owner didn't agree with Paul, and the officer believed them. So, in spite of the weather, we sailed along the coast hoping to reach the harbor of Phoenix, where the ship could stay for the winter.

Shipwreck

14-17. Soon after we pulled out, a strong wind took hold of the sails and drove us out to sea. The storm was so powerful that we couldn't control the ship. When the winds quieted some, the sailors pulled the lifeboat back on board so we wouldn't lose it. They tied ropes around the ship to hold it together, and lowered the sails so that we

wouldn't be caught by another wind.

18-20. The next day the storm was so bad that the sailors dumped the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. By the third day they even threw some of the ship's equipment overboard. Still the storm didn't let up. For many days we couldn't see the sun or the stars to let us know where we were. We were lost and began to lose all hope.

21-22. Everyone on board was seasick and had not eaten for days. Then Paul shouted above the wind, "Friends, we could have avoided all this trouble. I warned you not to leave Fair Havens to go on to Phoenix. If you had listened, we would not have been caught in this winter storm. But now, cheer up. Not one of you will lose your life. However, the ship is doomed."

23-26. "Last night an angel spoke to me in a vision. He was sent by God to tell me that I will reach Rome and appear before the emperor. He also said that God heard my prayers for you and will save everyone on board. So take courage. God always keeps His word. Soon we'll reach another island. But the ship will be wrecked."

27-29. After fourteen days at sea and being driven hundreds of miles off course, the sailors could tell that we were nearing land. About midnight they dropped a line with a weight to measure the water, and it was only 120 feet deep. A little later it was ninety feet deep. Then they let down four anchors and prayed for daylight.

30-32. During the night some of the sailors tried to lower the lifeboat and escape. They pretended they were dropping more anchors. But Paul saw it and said to the officer and other soldiers, "Unless we all stay on board, not one of us will survive." Then Julius ordered the guards to cut the

ropes holding the lifeboat and let it drop into the sea.

33-34. Just before dawn Paul begged everyone to eat something. He said, "For almost two weeks we've been in and out of storms and haven't eaten much. Some days we haven't eaten anything. But now, please try to eat something. You'll need energy to survive. Don't worry, not one of you will lose your life."

35-38. Then he took a piece of bread, thanked the Lord for it, and started eating. This gave others courage, and they all began eating too. There were about 276 people on board. After everyone had eaten something, the sailors threw more cargo overboard to lighten the ship.

39-40. When morning finally came, we could see land. But the sailors couldn't tell what island it was. They did see a bay with a nice beach that looked safe enough to run the ship into. So they cut the anchors, hoisted the sails, and let the ship go toward land.

41. But the ship hit a reef and stuck there. The violent waves kept pounding the back of the ship, and it began to break into pieces.

42. The soldiers feared that the prisoners would swim away and escape. They wanted to kill the prisoners to keep from having to pay for their escape with their own lives.

43-44. But Julius said, "No," because he liked Paul and didn't want anything to happen to him. Then he ordered everyone to jump overboard and head for shore. Those who couldn't swim grabbed a piece of floating wood and got to shore that way. Everyone did what he could and got safely ashore.

Malta. The natives had no education, but they were very kind to us. They helped us gather wood and start a fire, because we were wet and cold.

3-4. Paul helped gather wood. But as he threw his bundle of wood on the fire, a small poisonous snake bit his hand and hung on. When the natives saw this, they jumped back and said, "This man must be a murderer. Even though he escaped from the sea, the goddess of justice does not want him to live."

5-6. Paul shook the snake off into the fire, and nothing happened. The natives thought that his hand would swell and that he would fall over dead. They watched him for a while. When nothing happened, they changed their minds and said that Paul must be a god.

7. Nearby was the house of the chief. When he heard what had happened, he invited Julius and Paul and his friends to be his guests. We stayed at his house for three days. He was very kind to us.

8-9. Now, the chief's father was very sick. So Paul asked to see him. He prayed for him, and when he put his hands on the old man's head, he was healed. News about this spread fast. Soon everyone on the island who was sick came to Paul and was healed.

10. They gave us many gifts, and when we left for Rome, they also gave us what we needed for the trip.

11. We had been on the island for about three months. A ship had wintered on the other side of the island, and the captain agreed to take us on. So we finally sailed for Italy.

12-14. Our first stop was at the large island of Sicily, where we spent three days. From there we sailed to the southern tip of Italy, then north to a city near Naples. Julius gave us permission to spend a week with some believers there. This gave us a chance to rest

Paul Is Safe

28 When we were safe on shore, we learned that we were on the little island of

before walking the rest of the way to Rome, which was more than 100 miles.

15. Again and again believers came to see us, thanking us for telling them about Jesus. This gave Paul courage, and he thanked God for them.

16. We finally reached Rome, and Julius turned his prisoners over to the captain of the emperor's guard. Because Paul had been such a help to Julius, the captain let Paul live in a house with a soldier guarding him.

17. Three days later Paul invited the local Jews to come and see him. He said to them, "Brothers, I don't know what you've heard about me. I want you to know that I have done nothing against our people. Yet I was arrested in Jerusalem and accused of breaking the rules of the Temple.

18-19. "When the governor examined my case, he found that I had committed no crime and was ready to set me free. But the Jewish leaders objected. So before the governor turned me over to them, I appealed my case to the emperor.

20. "The reason I asked to see you is to tell you about the Messiah. It's because I believe that the hope of Israel has been fulfilled in a man called Jesus that I'm in chains."

21-22. They said, "No one has written to us from Jerusalem telling us what happened. And none of our Jewish

brothers have brought us word from there or said anything bad about you. We would like to hear what you have to say about the Messiah. We know that people here are talking against this new religion that you belong to."

23-24. So they agreed to meet again. The next time Paul talked with them all day. He showed them from Moses and the prophets that Jesus was the Messiah. When he finished, some believed, but some did not.

25-27. Then they started arguing with each other. Before they left, Paul said, "The Holy Spirit was right when through Isaiah He said to the people, 'You listen, but you don't hear. You look, but you don't see. Your heart is not in the right place. That's why your ears and eyes are closed. You don't want God to change you.'

28-29. "God's message of salvation is not only for you but also for others. Even if you don't accept Jesus as the Messiah, many of them will." But they didn't hear what Paul said. They just smiled, said goodbye, and continued to argue with each other as they left.

30-31. For the next two years Paul was kept under house arrest, with a guard by his side. But he was allowed to have visitors, and he always talked to them openly about Jesus, and no one stopped him.

Romans

INTRODUCTION: *Paul wrote this book for the believers in Rome. It's a long letter, called an Epistle. He wrote it from the city of Corinth, where he was doing missionary work during the winter of A.D. 57 to 58. Paul tells the believers that through faith in Jesus and what He did for us, we are made right with God. This means we are and should live for Him.*

The Apostle Paul

1 This letter is from Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ. God called me to be an apostle to spread the good news about His love. He promised, through the prophets, to send His Son to save us. And He has kept His word.

3-4. Jesus' human family line goes back to David. His divine nature makes Him the Son of God. This was powerfully confirmed by God when He raised Him from the dead through the Holy Spirit.

5-6. Jesus called me to help people accept Him as their Savior, to teach them to love and obey Him. He is calling you people in Rome to belong to Him too.

7. Give my greetings to all the members. God loves you. You are set apart by Him to be His people. May kindness and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's Missionary Plan

8-9. I praise God for each of you for giving your heart to Jesus and living for Him. Everywhere I go believers tell me how much faith you have. I serve God with all my heart preaching the good news of salvation. And I always pray for you.

10-12. If it's God's will, I will come to see you. I want to fellowship with you. I want to help you love Jesus even more. Also, we need each other's encouragement.

13. Brothers and sisters, this isn't the first time I've tried to come to see you. But for one reason or another it hasn't worked out. I surely would like to do evangelism in your city, as I've done in other places.

14-15. I owe Jesus so much because of what He has done for me. So I must take the good news to as many people as possible, no matter what country they're from or how much or how little education they have. That's why I want to preach about it in Rome.

16. I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. It's about God's power to save all who believe. This good news was given to the Jews first and then to the Greeks.

17. The gospel is for everyone. It's about God's goodness and His power to change us. As the Scriptures say, "God's people will live by faith." That's why He can pronounce me good.

People Who Sin

18-20. God is not pleased with those who hide the truth about Him by liv-

ing wicked lives. People can know about God and His power by looking at nature. It's been that way since He made the world. So human beings have no excuse for not knowing Him.

21-23. Even though they can see what God does for them, they don't thank or honor Him. They're proud of how much they know, but inside, their minds are dark. They think that they're smart, but they're fools. They stopped worshiping our glorious God and began worshiping images of people, snakes, cows, and birds.

24-25. God can't reach them, because they don't listen. So He lets them do what they want, even though it may harm them. Some act more like animals than people. They have traded truth for a lie, worshiping their own bodies instead of the God who created them. God is the one we should worship.

26-27. Because He is gentle and kind, God doesn't force people to be good. He gives them the right to choose. So people abuse the freedom God gave them. Women try to marry women, and men try to marry men. They're breaking God's law and will reap the consequences.

28-30. Because they don't listen to God, they can't even think right. So they do all kinds of wicked things. They lie, cheat, steal, gossip, and hate. They're envious, proud, and boastful. They even kill other people. They disobey their parents, and keep thinking up new ways to be evil.

31-32. They live as if they don't have a conscience. They break their promises and are mean. All they think about is themselves. They know that all this is wrong, but they keep right on doing it, and even approve of others doing it too.

God's People

2 There is no excuse to judge other people. When you criticize others, you condemn yourself, because you do some of the same bad things they do. Let God do the judging, because He knows the truth.

3-4. Do you think that because you're part of God's people, He will overlook what you do? Aren't you taking advantage of His kindness and patience? God's love and kindness are supposed to help you be good.

5-8. But if you insist on doing what you want, you'll have to face the consequences. If your sins don't catch up with you in this life, they will in the end. At that time we will all have to face what we have done. Those who have done their best to live for God will be honored and given eternal life. Those who have been stubborn and have disobeyed will be destroyed.

9-11. All who do evil will be condemned, whether they say they are part of God's people or not. Glory and honor will be given to those who do what's right, no matter who they are. God is always fair and treats everyone alike.

12-13. Those who don't know God's law will not be judged the same way as those who know it. But just knowing God's law does not mean that a person is good. Doing what God says is what counts.

14-16. There are good people who don't know God's law. They do what's right because they listen to God through their conscience. They think things through before they do them. At the end God will turn all judgment over to Jesus, who will look at everyone's heart, just as the gospel says.

Religious Pride

17-20. Those of you who feel good be-

cause you're God's people and know His law need to be careful that you don't become proud. God wants you to guide those who are blind and to be a light to those who are in the dark. This means that you're supposed to teach those who don't know God as you do.

21-23. But have you ever thought that you still have things to learn? When you tell others it's wrong to steal, do you steal? When you tell others not to be unfaithful in marriage, are you? When you tell others not to worship idols, are you making things more important than God? If so, you're breaking God's law.

24. As Isaiah said: "Many people have little respect for God because of what they see God's people do and the way those people live."

25-27. Jewish rituals are worth something only if you obey God. If you don't, your rituals mean nothing. But if non-Jews do what God says, won't He make them His people? In fact, they will be much better off than you Jews who don't obey God.

28-29. You see, a Jew is not a true Jew just because he's been born one. That's an outside thing and has nothing to do with his heart. Someone is a real Jew, a child of God, if his heart has been changed by the Holy Spirit. A true believer receives his honor from God and not from men.

Stop and Think

3 What advantage is there then in being a Jew? There are many advantages. Mainly, God entrusted the Jews with the Scriptures.

3-4. It's true that some of them did not believe what God said. Does that mean that God can't be trusted? Absolutely not! God doesn't use His Word to lie to us. As David said: "God's word is always true and right."

5-6. Some say, "If being bad makes God look good because of how much He forgives, then why is it wrong to be bad?" Such talk is foolish. If God doesn't care what we do, how could He judge us?

7. Others say, "If my lying makes God's truth even more important, why does He say that I'm a sinner?" That kind of talk, too, is foolish.

8. Some blame me for making people think that way. They say, "Paul tells us how bad we are and how wonderful God is to forgive us. So why am I told that I'm bad if by doing so I'm making God look good?" These people twist what I'm saying. They ought to be punished for it.

9. Let me repeat: Are God's people better than other people? No. All of us are guilty of sin.

10-18. As the psalm says: "No one is perfect. No one naturally longs for God. Everyone has done something wrong. People lie, curse, hate others, and commit murder. Everywhere they go they cause heartbreak and ruin. They don't know what real peace is because they have no respect for God."

19-20. I'm talking about my own people, who know God's law and claim to be religious. But we have all sinned and are guilty. No one is made right with God just by doing good deeds. That can't save us. All that God's law can do is to show us what's right and what's wrong.

The Solution

21-22. God is the one who saves us. The Scriptures tell us that again and again. God sent His Son to come here to die for us. Whoever believes in Him can be saved. He loves everyone.

23-24. All of us have sinned and fall short of God's standard. But we are made right with God by what Jesus

has done for us. It is by God's grace that we are saved.

25-26. God sent His Son to show us how much He loves us and that He has not forgotten our sin problem. This shows that God is fair and that He has a right to save anyone who puts their faith in Jesus.

27. So can we brag about ourselves? Or all the good things we do? No! Looking at what God did for us through Jesus puts an end to all our bragging.

28-30. There's only one answer. We are made right with God by faith in Jesus, not by what we know or by what we have done for Him. There is only one God, and He's the God of everyone. He makes people right with Him because of their faith, no matter who they are.

31. Does this mean that we can now do what we want and disobey God's law? No way! We live by the law because we love Him and are thankful for what He has done for us.

Abraham

4 Now let's look at Abraham. How does he fit into all this? The same rule applies to him. If he had been given a part in God's kingdom because he was so good and what he had done, then he could feel proud of himself. But the Scripture says that he put his faith in God, not in what he did. That's what made him right with God.

4-6. If one thinks he has to be good to be saved, then what he does becomes an obligation. He doesn't realize that salvation is a free gift of God's grace. But the faith of the one who believes and puts his trust in God is accepted, and that's what makes him right with God.

7-8. David said the same thing. A person is really blessed when God

accepts him as good. "Happy are they whose sins are forgiven. Happy is the one whose sins are not held against him."

9-10. Do we have to go through a lot of religious rituals to have that kind of happiness? Or can we be like Abraham and put our faith in God? When was Abraham made right with God? Was it before he went through a number of rituals and did a lot of good things, or afterward? It was before.

11-12. Abraham was made right with God because of his faith. That's what counted, not what he did. This means that whoever puts his faith in God belongs to Abraham. That's what makes him the spiritual father of all who have faith in God, no matter who they are or where they come from.

13-14. God promised Abraham and his descendants that the whole world would someday belong to them. This was because they would put their faith in God. If God would give the world to only those who can do everything right, then it wouldn't matter whether we had faith or not.

15. Even keeping God's law isn't enough to take care of our sins. The law can only tell us what sin is. It can't save us. If God had not given us His law, then we wouldn't know right from wrong.

16-17. God's promise rests on grace and faith, which makes it sure. That promise is for everyone who follows Abraham's example. That's why God said to Abraham, "I have made you the spiritual father of people from many nations." Abraham knew that God can do anything. He can give life to the dead, and He can create life from nothing.

18-20. When everything looked hopeless to Abraham because he had no children, he still had faith in God's

promise. He never forgot when God asked him to look at the stars and told him that's how many descendants he would have. He believed God even though Sarah was too old to have children. Over the years his faith grew stronger.

21-23. Abraham never doubted God's promise. That's why faith was to his credit.

24-25. And that's the same for us. We know that God keeps His promises, because He sent Jesus to die for our sins and then raised Him from the dead. It's what Jesus did for us that makes us right with God.

Right With God

5 We are made right with God through faith in what Jesus did for us. So we have peace with Him and are happy in the hope that He's coming back to take us home.

3-5. So we can face troubles and not become discouraged. Suffering gives us patience and shows others that we're people of faith and hope. God will not disappoint us. He has given us the Holy Spirit to pour God's love into our hearts.

6-8. At just the predicted time, Jesus came and died for us. We were helpless and unable to be good. It's possible to find someone who would die in place of a good person. But God showed how much He loves us by sending Jesus to die for us when we were still disobedient.

9-11. So we are made right with God by what Jesus has done for us. If God did all this for us when we were against Him, how much more will He do for us now that we're His friends! That's why we're so happy—because of what God did through Jesus to restore us to Himself.

Christ and Adam

12-14. Because of what Adam did, all people sin and die. Even before God gave His law at Sinai, people died. This shows that death happens because of what Adam did, not because of God's law.

15-16. As a result of Adam's sin, his sinful nature was passed on to us, whether we wanted it or not. But Jesus gives us a new nature—if we choose to have it. If Adam can pass death on to us, how much more can Jesus give us life! Adam's sin separated us from God, but Jesus' righteousness connects us to God.

17-19. If by one man's sin death came in, how much more can life come in by one Man who never sinned! If we are lost because of one man, Adam, how much more can we be saved by one Man, Jesus. If by one man's disobedience we were given a sinful nature, by one Man's obedience we can be made right again.

20-21. Now, God gave us His law so that we might know how bad sin is and understand that we need His help. As sin gets stronger, grace gets even stronger. Just as death comes to everyone, so God's gift of life comes to everyone who believes in Jesus.

Baptism

6 What should we say to all this? Should we keep on being evil so that people can see how full of grace God is? We shouldn't even think that way! How can we go back to being evil after changing the direction of our lives and giving our hearts to Jesus?

3-4. Don't you know that when you were baptized, you died to your old way of life? Baptism is just like being buried and resurrected, as happened to Jesus. He died on the cross and was resurrected to glorify God.

5-6. By baptism we were buried under the water, as Jesus was buried in the tomb; and we came up out of the water, as Jesus came out of the grave. So now we should live for Him. Baptism means that we are no longer slaves of sin!

7-8. When a person dies, sin can no longer control him. If we live for Jesus, sin can no longer control us. If we were resurrected from the water to live for Him, then He's in charge of us.

9-11. Jesus died once. So death no longer has power over Him. He died for our sins and now lives to carry on God's work. That's what we should do. We should die to our old way of life and live for God.

12-14. So don't let sin take charge of your body. Submit to God, who rescued you from Satan so that you can do good things for Him. Sin can't tell you what to do. God's grace has set you free from Satan's control so that you don't have to do what he says.

Freedom

15. So what should we do now that God's grace has set us free? Should we keep on sinning? Absolutely not!

16. Don't you know that whoever you turn your life over to, that person is in charge of you? So if you turn your life over to sinning, sin is in charge, and it will lead you to spiritual death. But if you turn your life over to Jesus, He'll lead you to eternal life.

17-19. I thank God that you have changed and are now living for Jesus. You're free from Satan's control and able to do what's right. I know that doing right isn't always easy. But just as you gave in to sin, you can now give in to Jesus, and you will grow to be more and more like Him.

20-22. Before you gave your heart to Jesus, you did evil things, and now

you are ashamed of them. Those things lead to eternal death. But now you are free from sin and are a willing servant of Jesus. This will lead you to everlasting life with Him.

23. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.

A New Life

7 Dear friends, you know that the law of a country tells you what you may and may not do as long as you live.

2-3. For instance, a married woman should be faithful to her husband as long as he is alive. But when he dies, she's free to marry someone else. Now, if she lives with another man while her husband is still alive, she's guilty of breaking the law. Only after he dies is she free to marry again.

4. It's the same way with us and Jesus. We can't belong to Him and live in sin at the same time. We were married to sin until our life of sinning died. Now we belong to Jesus and should be faithful to Him.

5-6. The law told us that it is wrong to sin. Since our old life of sinning is dead, we're free to live a new life. We now belong to Jesus. We serve Him, not because we have to, but because we love Him and want to.

God's Law Is Good

7. Does this mean God's law is bad because it told us that we were bad? Absolutely not! Without God's law we wouldn't know what is right or wrong. For example, I wouldn't have known that it was wrong to want what belongs to someone else if the tenth commandment hadn't told me so.

8-9. The commandment was plain. But sin kept making me more and more jealous. Then God used the commandment to speak to my heart and con-

vict me of sin. I knew what that meant. I was doomed to die.

10-12. God's law was designed to make our lives better. But when I compared myself with His law, I felt awful. Sin had blinded me so that I didn't know my own heart. The holy law that God gave is just and good.

Paul's Struggles

13-14. Was it something good that condemned me to death? No. God's law wasn't against me; sin was. Sin led me into thinking that my zeal for God was good when actually I was being proud. This showed me how deceptive and evil sin is.

15-16. We know that God's law is good. But my nature is evil. I don't always understand what I'm doing. I don't always do the things that I want to do, and sometimes I do things that I don't want to do. But I know when I'm doing wrong, and that shows that God's law is helpful and good.

17-18. I'm not the one who wants to do these bad things, but my sinful nature wants to do them. I know that nothing good comes from my sinful nature. That's why I need God's help. By myself I can never be as good as I want to be. It just won't work.

19-21. The things that my heart wants to do, I don't always do, and the things that it tells me not to do, I sometimes end up doing. Now, if I really don't want to do it, it's not me but my sinful nature that wants to do it. I've learned this much: Even when I want to do good, sin is always there trying to influence me to do what I shouldn't.

22-24. I really appreciate God's using His law to point out my sin to me, because I want to be good. I don't want to sin. But there's that nature of mine, always ready to make me do it. What a miserable man I am! Who can help me?

25. I thank God that this problem has been solved by Jesus. I still make mistakes, and sometimes even do good things for the wrong reason. But I keep on serving God anyway, doing the best I can, no matter how many times my sinful nature trips me up.

The Holy Spirit Helps Us

8 No one who belongs to Jesus is turned away from God, because the Holy Spirit gives us a new nature. We are no longer slaves to sin. Sin tries to get us back on the road to death.

3-4. God's law cannot save us. But God sent Jesus to save us by overcoming sin and death for us. He kept God's law and gave us the credit. And the Holy Spirit helps us become more and more like Jesus.

5-6. Those who continue to listen to their sinful natures will sin and meet eternal death. But those who have been changed will do what the Holy Spirit wants them to and will have eternal life and peace.

7-8. Sinful minds don't like the law of God. They don't want to obey Him, because they prefer to sin. They can't live the way they want and please God.

9-11. But we are not slaves to sin. We obey the Holy Spirit. Anyone who does not listen to the Holy Spirit does not belong to Jesus. You belong to Jesus, so even when you die you have the hope of eternal life. If God raised Jesus from the dead, He can do the same for you, because you have the Holy Spirit in your heart.

12-14. We don't have to obey our old selves. If we do, we will die forever. But if we truly surrender to the Spirit's leading, we will live forever. Those who listen to the Holy Spirit are God's sons and daughters.

15-16. The Holy Spirit doesn't make

us slaves. Through Him we are born again, which makes God our Father. And what a kind and loving Father God is! The Holy Spirit in us confirms this new relationship.

17. So if we are God's children, then we'll be given a share of what Jesus receives. When Jesus was here, He suffered, even though He was the Son of God. So don't be surprised if we have to face some of the same things. But we will also share His glory.

18. The problems we face as Christians aren't worth mentioning when compared with what God will give us when Jesus comes back to take us home.

19-22. In fact, all creation is waiting for Jesus to come. Nature has suffered since Adam sinned, even though it didn't rebel against God. So creation is in pain with humans until things are made new again.

23. We know that things will change, because we have tasted the change in our own lives. We are full of hope, because we know that we will receive new bodies that will never die.

24-25. We are saved by believing. If we could understand everything, where would be the place for hope? Hope helps us to be patient.

26-27. The Holy Spirit is always with us. When we don't know how to pray, He helps us. He puts our feelings into beautiful words and talks to God for us. God knows that the Holy Spirit asks only for things that are for our good.

God Is on Our Side

28-29. We know that God will bring some good out of every situation when we love Him and stay true to Him. His plan is for us to be like Jesus. He's like the firstborn Son in God's family, and we are His brothers and sisters.

30. Those who put their destiny in God's hands will be forgiven of their

sins. He will help them to be like Jesus, and will someday take them to heaven.
31-32. What should we say about all this? If God is for us, what does it matter who's against us? If God loved us so much that He let Jesus come and die for us, won't He also do all He can to get us to heaven?

33-34. Who dares to accuse the people God declares righteous? Who will challenge God's judgment? It was God's own Son who died, who rose again, and who now represents us before the universe.

35-37. Who can separate us from Christ's love? Can trouble, persecution, hunger, danger, or death? No! As the Bible says: "We love the Lord and are willing to go through anything for Him." With Jesus we will more than conquer all these things.

38-39. Nothing can take away God's love from us. Not angels or demons, life or death, things present, things to come, or anything else. This is because we see God's love in what Jesus did for us.

God and His People

9 To be perfectly honest, what I'm really concerned about are the Jewish people. The Holy Spirit is my witness that I really want to see them saved.

3-4. I would be willing to give up heaven if that would help my people. They were chosen by God. They saw His power at Sinai. He gave them His law and entrusted them with the sanctuary.

5. The patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—are our ancestors, and we are the earthly family to which Jesus belongs. Now He's sitting next to God and is in charge of the whole universe. Praise His name forever!

6-9. I don't want you to think that

God's promise to make Israel great has failed. But not all Israelites are true Israelites. The real connection goes back to Abraham's son Isaac, who was born by a miracle. Sarah was too old to have a baby, but God promised that she would have a son, and she had Isaac.

10-13. Then Isaac married Rebecca, and they had twins. Before they were born, God decided that Jacob, the second twin, should carry on the heritage. He was given that honor, not because he earned it, but because that's what God decided. He simply said, "The second twin will be given the honor." This was not the custom. The first twin usually got it.

14-16. What should we say? Was God being unfair? Does God play favorites? No! God said to Moses, "I will decide on whom to have mercy." God makes decisions based, not on what people think He should do, but on what He sees as best.

17-18. That's what happened in Egypt. God said, "I will show My power and spread My name around the world." So we see that God can do whatever He decides.

19. You're going to say to me, "If God decided that we Israelites are His people, why does He find fault with us? Things are going to be the way He decides no matter what we do."

20-21. Who are you to challenge God? A clay jar doesn't tell the one who's making it how to make it. Doesn't the potter decide to make some jars one way and other jars another way? It depends on what they're needed for to carry out his plan.

22-24. God doesn't have to get permission for what He does. Can't He be patient with those who don't know Him and merciful to those who love Him? Of course! That's His right as

Creator. He loves everybody, no matter where they live or who they are.

25-26. As He said through the prophet Hosea: "I will invite others to be part of My people and will let them know that I love them too. This has happened and will happen. All who accept My invitation will be called the children of the living God."

27-28. The prophet Isaiah said, "Though God blessed His people and promised that Israel would be great, few of them will be saved. But God will fulfill His promise, and when the time comes, He will finish His work quickly."

29. Isaiah also said, "If God had not worked a miracle by giving Abraham a son, our future would have been hopeless."

30. So what's the answer about God's promise to Israel? All people everywhere who give their hearts to God belong to Him. Everyone who has the same faith in God that Abraham did is counted righteous.

31-32. But those descendants of Abraham who have tried to earn God's love and mercy are not included in God's family. Why? Because they would not accept Jesus as their Savior.

33. As God says in the Bible, "I am placing a Stone in the streets of Jerusalem over which people will stumble and fall. But whoever leans on this Stone will not be disappointed."

The Gospel

10 Brothers and sisters, my prayer is that every Israelite would be saved. They are very zealous for God, but not for the right reason. They don't understand God's plan. Too many are trying to work their way to heaven. They're not depending on what God has already done for them.

4. Jesus' dying for us makes it clear

that we can't save ourselves, no matter how good we are. To be saved, we must give our hearts to Jesus and put our faith in Him, not in what we can do. **5-7.** Moses said, "If being saved came from God's law, then we would have to keep it perfectly. We couldn't make one mistake." But being saved comes from what Jesus has done for us. He didn't come down from heaven to love us because we were so good. Neither did our power raise Him from the dead.

8-9. Moses said, "God's salvation is close to each of us. He has changed us and written His law on our hearts. He has also given us His word and told us to share it with others." So if we're not ashamed of Jesus and in our hearts continue to believe that God raised Him from the dead, then we will be saved.

10-13. Faith is a matter of the heart. When we love Jesus, then we're made right with God. As the Scripture says: "Whoever believes in Jesus will not be disappointed." God makes no difference between people. He loves everyone and helps all those who trust Him. Whoever asks God to save him will be saved.

14-15. But how can anyone come to God and ask Him for help if he doesn't know Him? How can people come to Jesus if they've never heard about Him? And how can people hear about Him if no one tells them? That's why the prophet Isaiah said, "How beautiful is the sight of messengers bringing the good news of Jesus to others."

16-17. But not every Israelite has accepted this good news. The prophet Isaiah also said, "Lord, not everyone believes what we're saying to them." Faith comes from listening to what God says about Jesus in His word.

18-19. Let me ask you: haven't people heard about God? Yes, they have! God

speaks through nature to people everywhere. He also spoke to Israel through Moses, saying, "I will make other people My people too. They will understand spiritual things even better than you do."

20-21. Isaiah the prophet boldly spoke for God: "Those who haven't known Me will find Me. I will reveal Myself to those who have not heard about Me." Speaking of Israel, God said, "Every day I stretch out My arms of love to a people who disobey Me."

God's True People

11 Has God turned against His people? Of course not! I'm living proof that that isn't so. I'm a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin. Notice how God answered Elijah when he was discouraged. Elijah complained, "Lord, these people have killed many of Your prophets, and now they're after me, too." God replied, "There are 7,000 who listen to My prophets and who remain loyal to Me."

5-6. It's the same today. While many Jewish people have turned against Jesus, many have accepted Him. By God's mercy and grace they are His people, but not by what they have done for Him. If they could be God's people by what they have done, then being saved would not be God's doing, but theirs.

7-8. For years Israel tried hard to be right with God by what they could do. But only those who accept God's salvation as a gift are made right with Him because of what Jesus did. Moses said, "God can't give His grace to those who don't want it. They have closed their eyes and ears to truth."

9-10. David said, "May the many blessings they now enjoy fail. Then perhaps they will wake up and give their hearts to God."

11. Does this mean that the Jewish people will be lost? Certainly not! But because so many of them rejected Jesus, God is sending His message to others. Hopefully, when they see the good news going everywhere, they'll want to be part of God's new people too.

12. On the other hand, when Israel rejected Jesus, it turned out to be a blessing, because now the good news is going even faster. Just think how wonderful it would have been if all Jews had accepted Jesus and taken the good news to the world!

13-14. As you can tell, I've been talking about my own people. Now let me say a word to you who are not Jews. God asked me to be your apostle. So I'm committed to do everything I can to help you and to help my people through you. Hopefully, seeing how happy you are in Jesus will wake them up, and they too will be saved.

15. If what they did to Jesus brought the gospel to you and gave you life, what will it be to them if they accept Jesus? It will be like a resurrection from the dead.

Spiritual Israel

16-17. Israel is like an olive tree. Some branches have been broken off, because some of their people have turned against Jesus. But other branches have replaced them, because people like you have accepted Jesus. Remember that both the original branches and the new branches get their life from the same roots.

18-19. Don't think that you're better than the Jewish people or that you're more spiritual. It's the root system that gives all the branches life. Some of you will say, "But the old branches were broken off to make room for us."

20-21. Wait a minute. Why were some

of the Jewish branches cut off? Because they put their faith in themselves and not in God. The only difference between you and them is that from the very first you put your faith in God. But don't become proud. If God had to cut off dead branches before, He can do it again to you.

22. You have to think of not only God's love but also His justice. He was being fair when He cut the dead branches off His olive tree. And you can stay attached to His tree only if you continue to be grateful for what God has done for you. Otherwise your faith in Him will die, and He will have to cut off your branch too.

23-24. If people represented by the original branches would accept Jesus and put their faith in God, they could be grafted back into the tree. That would be easier than taking branches from a totally different tree and grafting them in.

25-27. I'm telling you this so that you can better understand what God has in mind for you. Don't become proud. God's plan is to have a people with Jesus in their lives. These are the ones He calls His own, no matter where they come from. All who love Him and honestly believe will be saved. As God said: "My Son will come and take away all evil from My people. This is what I promised to do for them."

28-31. Just because some of His people rejected Jesus doesn't mean that God doesn't love them or that He's changed His plan. What happened to your hearts can happen to theirs, too. So even though they rejected Jesus, God wants to do for them what He has done for you.

32-33. All of us have disappointed God at one time or another. Yet He loves everyone. Oh, the depth of His wisdom! How good and kind He is to

us! How impossible it is for us to understand His judgment and ways of doing things!

34-36. As the Scriptures say: "Who can explain everything that God does and why? Who advises Him? Who has ever given anything to God that He had to repay?" He made all things, and everything continues because of Him and for Him. To such a great God be glory forever! Amen.

Give Your Life to God

12 Since God loves us so much, I beg you to offer yourselves a living sacrifice to Him. Show your love by obeying and worshiping Him. Don't let the world change you. Let God change you and guide your thinking. Then you'll know what to do to please Him.

3-5. Don't think you're better than someone else. See things the way you should, based on your faith in God. The church is like a human body with many parts. Each part has its own work to do. Even though there are many of us, we're all part of one body. We need to work together to keep the body going.

6-8. In the church we have different jobs to do, depending on what fits us best. If you have the gift of prophecy or preaching or teaching, then use it for God. If you have the gift of counseling or encouraging others, then do that. If God has prospered you, then use your money to help others.

Love Each Other

9-11. Be sincere in what you do, and don't just pretend. Turn away from evil and do good. Be kind and courteous, honoring others above yourself. Don't be lazy. Put your heart into what you do, because you're working for the Lord.

12-13. Be happy because of the hope you have in Jesus. Hold on when troubles come. Don't stop praying. Share what you have with church members who need help. Be hospitable and invite people into your home.

14-16. Instead of being angry at people who have hurt you, pray for them. Don't curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Be friendly with rich and poor alike. Don't think you're better or smarter than others.

17-20. If someone does something wrong to you, don't try to get even. Do your best to get along with everyone. Turn your hurt over to God. He promises, "Someday I will make everything right." Jesus said, "If your enemy is starving, feed him. If he's thirsty, bring him some water."

21. So don't let hurts get to you. Get rid of your hurts by doing good for someone else.

Be Good Citizens

13 Obey the government. It is part of God's plan to hold evil in check. Anyone who is against law and order is against what God has commanded. And if you break the law, you'll be arrested.

3-4. Police arrest people who are doing evil, not those who are doing good. You don't have to be afraid of the police unless you are breaking the law. So be good. In one sense, police officers are serving God, because they arrest and punish those who do mean things. And if you break the law, you are making your country evil.

5-7. So be good citizens. Pay your taxes. This helps support the government so that it can keep law and order. Be sure to give the government whatever belongs to it, and respect those in authority.

8-10. Pay your bills. Love your neighbors and be helpful. That's what God's law is all about. Don't lie, steal, or kill. Be faithful and unselfish. God's commandments are based on love, so love your neighbor as you love yourself. Love doesn't hurt people. To love is to live by God's law.

11-12. Knowing how little time we have, we need to pay attention to what is important. We could be killed in an accident or die for our faith. Every day brings us closer to our heavenly home. Soon the night of sin will be gone and God's new day will come. So put away everything dark and evil and put on God's armor of light.

13-14. Let us walk and live honestly as in the daylight. Don't do things that people like to do in the dark. They have wild parties, get drunk, fight, steal, and do all kinds of evil things. Live for your friend Jesus. Don't be like people who live only for themselves and keep giving in to their sinful natures.

Good Advice

14 Be sure to welcome new believers, even those who may be spiritually weak. Don't argue about opinions on minor matters. That won't help new members. Some of them eat food offered to idols. Others won't touch it.

3-4. Don't judge people or look down on them for what they believe. Each person has to make up his own mind. God loves everyone, and He'll help them know what is right and wrong.

5-6. The same rule applies to special days. One person thinks he has to keep all the Jewish festivals, and another doesn't. People need to make up their own minds. So some keep all the festivals, and some follow a stricter diet than others. As long as

they love God and are grateful for what He has done for them, that's what really matters.

7-8. We are not to live just to please ourselves. Our lives belong to the Lord, whether we live or die.

9-10. Jesus died for our sins and then rose from the dead. So He's in charge of the living and the dead. We are saved by what He did, not by what we do. So don't judge others or use your Christian experience to measure theirs. All of us must answer to God individually.

11-13. Jesus said, "One day every knee will bow to Me. Everyone will admit that I am God." We alone are accountable to Him for what we do. So let's not make it harder for each other to live for Jesus.

14-15. The Lord has shown me that if some members think eating food offered to idols is wrong, then they shouldn't do it. But if you feel that it's all right, don't deliberately eat it in front of them and weaken their faith. Don't forget that Jesus died for that person, too.

16-18. Don't spoil the good news of the gospel by making an issue over little things, such as food. What's really important is being made right with God through Jesus and being full of joy in the Holy Spirit. In this way we please both God and others.

19-21. So let's do the things that make for peace and help each other. Showing that you can eat and drink as you please could question the work that God is doing in their hearts. You mustn't think just of yourself, but of others, too.

22-23. Whatever your thoughts are about this, keep them to yourself. If you feel that it's all right to eat food offered to idols, then do it at home with gratitude to God for what He has done

for you. But if you tell others that it's sinful to eat food offered to idols and then eat it at home, that's deceitful. It will undermine your faith. And anything that undermines faith is sin.

Helping Each Other

15 If you are spiritually strong, then help those who are spiritually weak. Don't just please yourself. We should help each other, because we're brothers and sisters in the faith. Jesus lived not for Himself, but for us. All our sins were placed on Him.

4-6. What was written in the Scriptures was written not just to help the people back then, but also to help us. That gives us courage and hope. May God provide a spirit of unity among all those who love Jesus. Then with one mind and voice we can worship our heavenly Father.

7-10. Accept each other as Jesus accepted you. He came to show us that God's promises to the Jewish people are true. He also came to help others praise God for His goodness. As the Scripture says: "Rejoice, for you too are part of God's people."

11-12. It also says, "Praise the Lord, all you who are not Jews, for what He has done for you." Isaiah said, "A descendant of Jesse [David's father] will be the Savior of people everywhere. They will love the Lord and place their hope in Him."

13. So may the God of hope fill your hearts with joy and peace. Then your lives will overflow with hope and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Paul's Missionary Plans

14-17. I feel that you are good people. And I know that you can help and encourage each other. I've written some strong things to you, which I don't

normally like to do. But God appointed me to be your apostle. So I'm like a priest bringing offerings to God, and you are my offerings. That's why I have a right to be pleased in what the Holy Spirit has done for you through me.

18-19. I wouldn't think of talking this way about myself and what I have done. But the Holy Spirit has changed you and helped you to follow Jesus and obey Him. I've preached the good news in many places and have seen many miracles done by the Holy Spirit.

20-21. Ever since the Lord called me to preach, I've tried to take the good news to places where people have not heard of Christ. As the Bible says: "The gospel will be taken to those who have never heard about Jesus, so that they will know how much He loves them and what He did for them."

22-24. I've tried to get to Rome a number of times, but something always came up. Now that I've finished my other missionary journeys, I'm ready to come to see you. I'm actually planning to go to Spain, because no one has taken the gospel there. But on the way I want to stop and visit you. Hopefully you can help me with my work in Spain.

25-27. However, first I must go to Jerusalem to take offerings for the poor that the members here are sending. Our people in Palestine are having a hard time. The members in Greece and Asia Minor were more than glad to help their Jewish brothers and sisters. This was their way of thanking them for sharing the gospel.

28-29. After I go to Jerusalem, I'll head for Spain and stop to visit you. When I come, I'll share with you many other spiritual blessings from the gospel.

30-32. In the meantime, pray for me, as I go to Jerusalem, that I'll be able to

face those in Israel who don't believe in Jesus. And pray that believers there will accept, without misunderstanding, the offering I'll take.

33. In the meantime, may the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

Pass Along Greetings

16 When Sister Phoebe comes, give her a warm welcome. She's a deaconess from Corinth. I highly recommend her, so help her in any way you can. She's been a great help to many, especially to me.

4-5. Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila. They are my helpers. They risked their lives for me. I'm so thankful for them, as are all the Gentile believers. Also, give my greetings to those meeting at their house.

6-7. Greetings to my friend Epaphroditus. He was the first one I baptized there. Say hello to Mary, who worked hard to help us. Greetings to my relatives, Andronicus and Junia, who were put in prison for Jesus, as I was. Actually, they believed in Him before I did. The apostles know them well.

8-14. There are many others you can greet for me. Their faith has been severely tested, yet they stayed loyal to Jesus. You have some great families among you. Greet the women I told you about who never seem to stop working for Jesus. Say hello to Rufus, a devoted follower of Jesus, and to his mother, who treated me as she would her own son.

15-16. Greet all the believers who worship with you and those who live

with Olympas and his family. When you see them, give them a hug for me. All the church members here send their greetings and love to you.

17-18. Watch out for those who create problems and criticize what you've been taught. Sometimes it's best just to avoid them. They're not really interested in Jesus, but in themselves. They sound very kind, but they do it so that they can deceive people. They serve their own interests, not Christ.

19-20. You have a reputation for holding on to your faith. We hear this wherever we go, and it makes me happy. Still, I want you to be careful to whom you listen. Recognize the difference between right and wrong. The God of peace will help you to overcome Satan's work even in Rome. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

21. Timothy also sends his greetings. So do the other workers here with me.

22. (I am Tertius, and am writing this letter for Paul. I send you greetings.)

23-24. Gaius is letting us use his home here in Corinth. He sends his greetings, as does Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus. May Jesus be with you.

25-26. God has the power to keep you in the faith and to help you hold on to Jesus. For many centuries the gospel was preached through symbols of the sanctuary, but now it's being preached openly from prophecies in the Scriptures. This way people everywhere can understand it and believe in Jesus.

27. To our wise God be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.

1 Corinthians

INTRODUCTION: *This is another letter from Paul. It was written to the believers in Corinth from the city of Ephesus about A.D. 57. In this letter Paul helped them solve some of their church problems. They needed to know more about the sacredness of marriage, the Lord's Supper, and worship services. From this book we learn that love is more important than anything else we can do for Jesus.*

A Letter From Paul

1 This letter is from Paul, who was called by Jesus to be an apostle. It's being sent to the church in Corinth to be read to the members there and to churches everywhere. Those who believe in Jesus are saints, people who have been set apart for Him, their Lord and Savior. May God's grace and peace be with you.

Spiritual Blessings

4-6. I thank God for the blessings He has given your church. You have many gifted people to help you better understand the gospel and how to share it with others. When we were there, we confirmed that some even have the gift of prophecy.

7-8. So your congregation is well equipped with spiritually gifted people as you look forward to the return of Jesus. He is the one who will keep you strong so that you can stand before the universe, innocent of sin.

9. What God says is true. He has invited you to accept Jesus as your Savior so that you can have fellowship with Him forever.

The Importance of Unity

10. You need to work together and hold on to what you believe, so that

your church doesn't become divided. Your goal is to be like Jesus and live for Him.

11-12. But one of the families told me that you're forming groups within the church. One group says that they belong to me, another group says that they belong to Apollos, another to Peter, and still another group says that they belong to Jesus.

13. Let me ask you a question. How can a church that loves Jesus be divided? Did Paul, Apollos, or Peter die for you? Of course not!

14-16. In fact, I'm glad I baptized only two of your members. If I had baptized more, that would really cause a split. Some would even say that I baptized them in my name. That I never did and would never do. I just remembered—I did baptize another family. But that's all.

17. God called me, not to baptize, but to preach the good news about Jesus. I do that in simple language so that people can understand. If I preached with big words, the gospel would lose its power.

Human Wisdom

18. Some people think that preaching about a Man dying on a cross for our salvation is foolish. But those of

us who have accepted Jesus as our Savior know that the gospel carries the power of God.

19. As God says in the Bible, "I will not accept the wisdom of scholars as a means of salvation. Sin cannot be solved by human reasoning."

20-21. Where does that leave those who think they know so much? God's plan of salvation makes all their religious learning look foolish. People can never know God by only studying about Him. They have to give their hearts to Him and believe what He says, even if it does sound foolish.

22. The Jews want to see miracles before they believe, and the Greeks want everything to be logical.

23-24. But we keep right on preaching about Jesus and what He did for us on the cross. The Jews keep on looking for the Messiah, and the Greeks think the death of Jesus and His resurrection is nonsense. But for those of us who have accepted the gospel, the death and resurrection of Jesus is real, full of the power and wisdom of God.

25. God doesn't do anything foolish. He knows much more than people do. And Jesus' death on the cross is power, not weakness.

26. Brothers and sisters, stop and think about the kind of people you were before you gave your hearts to Jesus. Not many of you were educated or wealthy or had great influence.

27. But God used the simple means of preaching to bring you to Jesus and to challenge those who think they're so smart and know so much.

28-30. He uses humble, teachable people to put to shame the wisdom of the world. God does it this way so that no one can say that their intelligence and education are what saved them. Jesus is our wisdom and strength, our Savior and Friend.

31. As the Scripture says: "If anyone wants to brag, let him brag only about Jesus."

Paul's Preaching

2 My brothers and sisters, when I first came to your city to preach, I didn't come to show you how smart I was. I simply shared with you God's plan of salvation. And I determined not to preach about anything but Jesus and what He did for you.

3. I came to you humbly, depending on God. I was afraid that if I came to you as someone highly educated, using fancy words, you would focus on me and not on Jesus.

4-5. So I didn't use big words. Instead, the power of the Holy Spirit led you to accept Christ. Your faith is to be not in what man says, but in what God says.

Spiritual Thinking

6-7. Those who think spiritually can see that the gospel is not the wisdom of the world. Someday that kind of wisdom will be gone. God's plan of salvation might sound strange, but He planned it for our good before He created the world.

8-9. This is what the Jewish leaders could not understand. If they had, they would not have crucified Jesus. As the Bible says: "Man can't see, hear, or understand all the things that God has prepared for those who love Him."

10-11. The Scriptures tell us about God's plan for us. The Holy Spirit is able to read the mind of God. So He helped people write the Scriptures so that we can understand God's thoughts.

12-13. What we shared with you is based not on man's wisdom, which is to find happiness in the things of this life. Rather, it is on what the Holy Spirit has given us. This will help us to love God and appreciate everything He

has done for us. The Holy Spirit is ready to help anyone who wants to understand spiritual truth.

14. Without the Holy Spirit, people are not interested in what God is trying to tell them. They don't understand, and think it's foolish. But if you really want to know what God is trying to tell you, you need the Holy Spirit to help you.

15. Those who are spiritually minded will understand God's word. Others who are not spiritually minded have no right to judge them.

16. As the Scripture says: "Who on his own can know what God thinks?" No one! But the Holy Spirit helps us to think like Jesus.

Focus on Jesus

3 When I first came to you, I couldn't talk to you as spiritual adults. Your thinking was worldly. So I had to feed you like babies—with simple truths. You weren't ready for grown-up spiritual food. Even now I'm not sure you're really ready for it.

3-4. Your actions show that you are still thinking a lot like the world. You're jealous of each other. You argue over things that are not important. You take sides with your favorite leader or preacher. These are things the world does. One says, "I'm Paul's man!" Someone else says, "I'm for Apollos!" Isn't that like the world?

5-6. What is so important about Paul or Apollos? We are nothing compared to Jesus. Our job is to build up your faith and confidence in God and His Son. I came and planted the seed of the gospel. Then Apollos came and watered it. But it was God who made it grow.

7-9. So the one who plants and the one who waters are not important. Only God is important, for He puts life

into the seed. Those who plant and water are just workers. God will reward them based on the way they did their jobs. Apollos and I are only God's servants, nothing more. But you are God's harvest field, His farm.

10-11. You are also like a house. With God's help I have tried to be a good builder. I laid the foundation of that house using the gifts God has given me. Others are now building on that foundation. But he who builds should be careful how he builds, because there is only one foundation, and that foundation is Jesus.

12. Anyone who builds on that foundation needs to use the right material. Some use spiritual material that's more valuable than gold and precious stones. Others use material that's more like wood, grass, and straw.

13-15. Every spiritual builder's work will be tested. Troubles and persecutions are like a fire that will show what material has been used in a building. If the faith of believers is still standing, the builder will be rewarded. But if the faith of the believers burns up, the builder himself might be saved, but barely.

16-17. Don't you know that a church of believers is like a temple? Each member is a living stone because the Holy Spirit lives in their hearts. Now, if anyone tries to destroy this spiritual temple, God will destroy him, because His temple is holy. And you are God's temple.

18-20. Don't be deceived by some brilliant speaker. If he really loves Jesus, he'll be humble, knowing that true wisdom is from God. Worldly wisdom is as nothing to God. The Scripture says, "The Lord knows that people's thoughts are like a puff of wind."

21-23. So don't brag about speakers. All the blessings of God are yours be-

cause of Jesus. We preachers are not competing with each other. We're all working, each in his own way, for your benefit, because you belong to Jesus. And Jesus belongs to God.

God Decides

4 You need to think of us as servants of Jesus. God has trusted us to share His truths with you. He expects us to be faithful. It doesn't matter if you or others judge me. I don't even judge myself.

4-5. I have been trying to do a good job, but that doesn't mean I'm perfect. The Lord is my judge. So don't set yourself up to judge others. Wait until the Lord comes, and let Him do it. He will look at not only what a person has done but also why he did it. Then every true servant of Jesus will be honored.

Being a Fool for Jesus

6. Both Apollos and I are servants of Jesus. You need to listen to us, but only if we stay with what the Bible says. If you keep comparing us, you'll end up being proud of one and hating the other.

7. Who invited you to come out of the world? Who gave you the spiritual riches you have? If you have been given all this, why do you act as if you produced it?

8. You act like kings. You feel that you are spiritually rich and don't need our help. We wish that were true.

9. Sometimes I feel as if God put us apostles in an arena to fight lions, like men sentenced to die. We're like a show for men and angels alike.

10. Some consider us fools because we depend on God's wisdom instead of the world's. Others think that we're weak and that they're strong. They think that they know everything spiritual that there is to know.

11. For years we have suffered for Jesus. We haven't had enough to eat or enough clothes to keep us warm. We've been beaten and left for dead. We have no homes.

12-13. We worked with our hands to support ourselves. When people cursed us, we blessed them. When they hurt us, we did not complain. When people insulted us, we answered with kind words. To this very day, people treat us like dirt.

Paul's Concern

14-16. I'm telling you these things not to make you feel sorry for me, but to help you. You're my spiritual sons and daughters. You may have many teachers, but only one spiritual father who brought you to Jesus. So listen to me and follow my example.

17. That's why I decided to send Timothy to see you. He's like my adopted son. I trust him. He'll go over the gospel with you and tell you how to live for Jesus. It will be the same thing I teach everywhere.

18-19. Some of you will be offended because I'm not coming myself. Don't worry; I'll come as soon as I can, if it's the Lord's will. When I do come, I want to talk to the false teachers who try to undermine my ministry.

20-21. The gospel is more than just talk. It's full of power, and changes people to be like Jesus. Talk is cheap. So when I come, what do you prefer I do? Do you want me to be hard on you, or do you want me to be gentle and kind?

Sin in the Church

5 I've heard that one of your grown men goes to bed with his step-mother. That is evil. Everybody knows this, yet you don't even say anything about it. How can you be spiritually minded while you let this

kind of thing go on? His membership should be taken away.

3-5. Even though I'm not there, I don't have to think twice to tell you what to do. So the next time you meet, take action. In my mind I'll be there with you. I know that Jesus will. You need to tell this man that certain things are not right for Christians to do. Maybe this will wake him up, and he'll stop and give his heart to Jesus.

6-7. For you to feel proud because you overlook sin is not good. That attitude is like yeast. It will affect the whole church. That's why at Communion we use bread without yeast—because Jesus was without sin. That's why He was able to die in our place.

8. I hope that you will take care of this problem before your next Communion service. Love this man, but you must also discipline him. Be sincere and honest in both your love and your discipline.

9-10. I warned you about being friendly with members who are living in open sin, but saying nothing to them about it. This makes it look as if you approve of what they're doing. I'm not talking about nonmembers. If you didn't welcome them, how would you bring them to Jesus?

11. I'm talking about members. When a member lives in open sin, and people in the community know that he or she is doing bad things, you need to do something about it. If you don't, people get the idea that Christians can do anything they want as long as they keep coming to church.

12-13. It's not our business to go around telling people what to do if they're not members. But we are responsible for sin in our own church family. God will judge other people, but it's our responsibility to discipline members who openly sin.

Going to Court

6 The other thing I heard is that when you have a disagreement with your brother, you immediately go to court. That's not good. Why can't church members settle their differences among themselves?

2-4. Don't you know that one day God's people will sit with Jesus to judge the whole world? You need to settle these little differences yourselves. Someday you'll be judging wicked angels. So learn to handle things in the church. There's no reason you should depend on nonmembers to help settle your problems.

5-6. If you think that I'm trying to shame you into doing what you should, you're right. There must be at least one of you who can help settle things between members. Why go to court and have a nonbeliever settle differences among believers?

7-8. Don't turn every little difference you have into a lawsuit. Settle things among yourselves, even if it costs you something. That's better than making your differences public and shaming Jesus. Some of you are quick to condemn others, but look at yourselves. You don't hesitate to lie and cheat your own church members.

9-11. Don't you know that those who worship idols, steal, are selfish, get drunk, abuse and bad-mouth others, or cheat will not go to heaven? Some of you did these things before you heard the gospel and gave your hearts to Jesus. But with God's help you started a whole new life.

Your Body Belongs to Jesus

12-13. Some of you say, "Jesus died for me, so now I can do what I want." Others say, "My body has nothing to do with how much I love Jesus." The body wasn't made for you to do with

as you please. It belongs to Him.

14-15. Just as God raised Jesus' body from the dead, so He plans to raise your body too. This means that your body is as important to Him as the body of Jesus. So who gave you the idea that you can do with your body whatever you want?

16-18. Some of you think that you can go to bed with whomever you please, even if you're not married. But when you were baptized you gave your body, not just your heart, to Jesus. Run from wickedness as fast as you can. Stop thinking that you can do with your body whatever you want. That's like sinning against your own body. Your body was made to honor God.

19-20. When you gave yourself to Jesus and were baptized, your body became a temple for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit in you is a baptismal present to you from God. Your body belongs to Him. God paid for it. So use your body to honor Him.

Marriage

7 Now let me answer some questions you wrote to me about.

Some of you are saying, "It's not good to get married. It's better to stay single." Under the present circumstances, when Christians are being persecuted and killed, I would agree.

2-3. However, there's another side to it. If two people are in love and want to get married, let them go ahead. There's nothing wrong with it. Let's not think that one way is right and the other wrong.

4-5. Those who are married should not live as if they're not. They belong to each other and should make each other happy. Now, if they want to stay apart for a little while so they can have more time for prayer, there's nothing wrong with that, either. But then they

should come together again and help each other stand against Satan.

6. Now, I can't give you a specific Bible text on this, or tell you about a vision I've had from the Lord about it. I can tell you only what I know the Holy Spirit would want me to say.

7. I wish all of you could be single, as I am, because it would make traveling easier for spreading the gospel. But everyone has to work for God as He directs.

8-9. My advice is that those of you who are single stay that way because of the present persecution that we're going through. But if a couple is really in love, let them get married. It's better to do that than being heartsick for each other all the time.

Marriage to Unbelievers

10-11. As I said, a married couple should not break up because they think they can survive the present persecution better alone. If they do and then find out that they can't stand being alone, let them get back together; but they should not marry someone else.

12-14. If you're married to a person who has not accepted Jesus, but you truly love and respect each other, stay together. God sees the two of you as one, set apart for Him. That includes your children. Because the whole family knows about Jesus, they all belong to God.

15-16. Now, if the husband or wife who has not accepted Jesus wants to leave, they should not be made to stay. God wants peace, not arguments. But staying together is much better, because your love and care might lead the unbelieving one to accept Jesus too.

Persecution

17-18. Continue to live as you were when you were baptized. This is what I tell all the churches. If you have been circumcised, fine. If not, don't worry about it.

19-20. Our relationship with Jesus doesn't depend on that. What's important is that we love Him and keep His commandments.

21-22. Some of you are slaves. This does not make you less important. If you are given a choice to be free, take it. But as soon as you gave your heart to Jesus, inside, you were free. And those of you who were free when you accepted Jesus became His happy slaves.

23-24. He paid for your sins whether you are a slave or are free. So be willing to serve Him in whatever circumstances you find yourself.

More Questions About Marriage

25. Your next question had to do with people who are single. Again, I can't give you a Bible text or tell you that I've had a direct word from the Lord, but I can tell you what I think Jesus would say.

26-27. You need to think of persecution. It's already happening to members in other places. So I would say that unmarried people should stay single for now. But if you're already engaged, go ahead and get married. If you're not married, don't be anxious to get married.

28. Unmarried people have an easier time during periods of persecution than married people do, because of painful separations. However, marriage is up to the individual.

29. The most important thing in life is to be ready to meet Jesus. That's more important than marriage. So it's best not to make plans too far into

the future for your daughters. Let them serve the Lord, and wait to see what happens.

30-31. If bad things happen, don't grieve too long. If good things happen, don't get carried away. And don't get too attached to things. One day they'll all be gone.

32-34. Try to be as free from worry as possible. A single man need think only of the Lord's work. But a married man must think about pleasing his wife and the Lord. It is the same for a married woman. She is busy caring for her family. Single men and women can give more time to the Lord.

35. During this time of persecution I'm telling you this for your own good. But you must make your own decision in the matter. I want you to be able to give your attention to the Lord's work while you have a chance.

36-38. Now, if a young man is engaged, but thinks that getting married at this time is wrong, yet he's deeply in love, let him go ahead and get married. If that's what he decides, it's not wrong. The only thing is that during these troublous times it's better to stay single.

39-40. Remember that when people get married they're obligated to stay together as long as they live. Only if one of them dies is the other one free to marry another believer. If he or she decides to remain single, that's not a bad idea, especially under the present circumstances. So you have my answer. I know that is what the Holy Spirit would want me to say.

Our Conscience

8 You wrote that eating meat offered to idols is not the same as worshiping them. I know that you're smart. But being smart doesn't mean you're right. It can lead to

pride. Love, on the other hand, always reaches out to help others.

2-3. A person who thinks he knows all the answers shows how little he knows. The most important thing is to love God, not to show off how much education you have. God knows who loves Him and who doesn't.

4. Now, back to this question of food offered to idols. Idols are only pieces of wood or stone. They don't know anything and can't help anyone. There's only one God, who rules the world and the whole universe.

5. People keep talking about their gods and the power they are said to have. They are supposed to live in heaven or on earth. But they are only imagined.

6. There's only one God, the Father of Jesus. He made all things, and it is through His power that we live. There's only one Savior, and that's Jesus. He's the one through whom all things are created and through whom we are saved.

7. But there are some who joined our church who still believe that idols have power. It takes time for them to get over this. So naturally they're scared to touch food offered to idols. And they don't want to be reminded of what they used to do.

8-9. Eating food offered to idols won't make God love you more or less. Just don't upset your new members by eating it in front of them.

10-11. If a new member sees you buying meat in an idol's temple, you're not helping him. When you tell him to go ahead and not let his conscience bother him, you're making it harder for him to forget about idols and hold on to Jesus.

12-13. When you do things that he thinks are wrong, you're sinning against him and God. You're sup-

posed to be helping him grow in his faith, not weaken it. If I knew that a new member was still struggling to get rid of his fear of idols, I wouldn't even touch a piece of idol meat. I will not hurt my brother by telling him to forget about his conscience.

Paul's Authority

9 Am I not a free man to an apostle? For three years Jesus personally taught me as He did the other apostles. Some people don't accept me as one, but your conversion is proof that I am an apostle.

3-6. Let me ask you: Don't apostles who work to bring people to Jesus have a right to be paid by the church? Don't we have a right to bring a wife along when we travel? Peter and the other apostles do. Barnabas and I are the only ones who have to work at another job to make a living.

7. What soldier goes to war without getting paid? Who would grow a vineyard and not eat some of the grapes? Or what shepherd doesn't drink some milk from his flock?

8-9. This isn't the way people think. The Scriptures teach us what's right. God told Moses to tell the people not to put a muzzle on their oxen when they tread out the grain. Is God concerned only about animals? Of course not.

10-11. This was written for us. The one who plows or works in the field should hope to receive something for that work. So if Barnabas and I sow spiritual seed and reap a harvest of souls for the Lord, don't we have a right to get paid so that we can eat?

12. If you're paying others who help you spiritually, shouldn't we be paid too? But we haven't asked for money. We don't want to do anything that would stop the spread of the gospel.

13-14. You know that those who work at the Temple get their food there. Those who help with sacrificial offerings are given some of it to eat. The same applies to pastors who stay in one place or evangelists who go from place to place.

15-16. I have never been paid for preaching. And I don't want to be. I would rather die than to have anyone think I'm preaching for money. I preach the gospel because God called me to do it. Woe is me if I don't!

17-18. If I preached just to have a job, I would expect you to pay me. But I preach because Jesus asked me to. The only pay I need is to see people like you accept Jesus. I support myself so that people will know that the gospel is free. It's a gift to all of us. That's why I don't demand my right to be paid.

Free but Obligated

19. Even though I'm a free man and a servant of no one, yet I'm a servant of everyone. I want to bring as many people as I can to Jesus.

20-23. So when I preach to the Jews, I try to live like them to win them to Jesus. When I preach to others, I try to live like them as much as God's law will let me in order to win them to Jesus too. I try to be sensitive to people's cultures so that we can share the blessings of the gospel together.

24. You know that in a race all runners do their very best. But only one gets the prize. In the gospel race you too must give it everything you have. So go ahead and run, and if you're a faithful runner, you'll win.

25. All who compete in athletic games train their bodies with exercise and are careful about what they eat. The winner gets a wreath of leaves that wither and fade away. But the Christian's tro-

phy is the golden crown of eternal life. **26-27.** So I don't run the Christian race without that goal in mind. Like a boxer, I make my actions count. I discipline myself. I don't just preach about Jesus, but try to live as He did. I don't want to miss out on heaven after I helped others get there.

Examples

10 We can learn lessons from our Jewish history. You recall a pillar of cloud led our ancestors through the sea. This cloud was really Jesus, and He brought them through the Red Sea. In that sense they were baptized by Moses in the presence of Jesus.

3-4. They also ate manna from heaven and drank water that came out of a rock. That rock represented Jesus. He was the one who gave them water.

5-6. In spite of all this, most of our people rebelled. So God let that generation die, except for a few. But He brought their children into the land of Canaan. These things are in Scripture so that we can learn from their mistakes.

7-9. While Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments, the people made a golden calf and worshiped it. Later some of them joined the pagans in their worship. Both times God had to punish them. One time He removed His protection, and poisonous snakes came into the camp. Many people were bitten and died.

10. So don't grumble and complain, as Korah and his followers did. They thought they could do a better job than Moses and Aaron in leading God's people, so God had to punish them.

11-12. These things are in the Scriptures as examples and warnings so that we don't rebel against God. While we as a church have more spiritual light than they had, don't think that

you can't fall into Satan's temptations.

13. God will not let you be tempted more than you can handle. He will always give you a way of escape. And He will be there to help you stand against it.

We Belong to Jesus

14-15. Finally, let me say this. Stay away from places where you know you will be tempted. Doesn't that make sense? Remember, you belong to Jesus.

16-17. At Communion we give thanks for the bread and grape juice. They represent the body and blood of Jesus. When we eat of it, we show that we are one family and that we all belong to Him.

18. Let's look at the Israelites again. When they ate some meat from the animal sacrifices, they were saying that they were worshiping God and belonged to Him.

19-20. It's the same for pagans who eat meat that's been offered to an idol. They're saying they belong to that idol. I know that when you go to an idol market to buy meat, it doesn't mean anything to you. But I don't want people to think that you're worshiping idols. So stay away from such places.

21. You can't attend Communion service and eat the bread and drink the grape juice with members and also go to a pagan temple to eat meat sacrificed to idols. This confuses people who know that you're a Christian.

22. If God had to punish His people back then, He certainly can do the same thing now. Don't think it can't happen to you.

Freedom in Jesus

23-24. A Christian is free to do as he wishes as long as it is according to Scripture or doesn't cause someone

else to sin. Don't just think about yourself, but try to be a blessing to others.

25-26. Some of the meat you buy at the market may have been offered to idols. Don't worry about it, because "the earth and everything in it belongs to the Lord."

27-28. If you're invited to a nonbeliever's house, eat what he serves you. Don't ask questions. But if he tells you that the meat has been offered to idols, then don't eat it. He is trying to help you avoid doing what you might think is wrong. Thank him.

29-30. I'm not suggesting that it's wrong, but he might. You say, "Why should someone else tell me what to do? If I thank God for the food and ask Him to bless it, what's the difference?"

31-33. Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it to honor God. Don't offend people and do things that might lead others to do wrong. I don't do just what's good for me. I try to be kind, and to please as many as I can because I want to draw them to Jesus.

Worship

11 Continue to follow my example, just as I follow Jesus' example. I'm so glad that you remember what I taught you and that you are following my teachings.

3. Now, I want to talk to you about worship and a few other things. A man is to look up to Jesus and lean on Him. A woman, while equal to man, is to lean on the strength of both Jesus and her husband. Even Jesus, though He was equal with God, leaned on the strength of His Father.

4-6. A man who covers his head when he prays or preaches dishonors Jesus. But when a woman prays or speaks in church she should cover her head, because that's our custom. If she doesn't, it's as bad as shaving her head.

7-9. A man should not cover his head in church, because he was created in the image of God, bringing glory to Him. But woman brings glory to man, because Adam was created first, then Eve to be his companion.

10. So a woman should wear a covering on her head as a sign of respect to God. That makes the angels happy.

11-13. Men and women are important to each other. In God's eyes they are equal, but each one has a different role. While woman came from man, no man is born without a woman. They're dependent on each other. So our custom is a sign of respect for God's arrangement.

14-15. Nature itself teaches you something like this. It's disgraceful for a man to wear long hair like that of a woman. But long hair looks nice on a woman, like a natural covering.

16. Now, if anyone wants to argue about this, just let me say that we have not changed anything. All of our churches follow the same custom.

The Lord's Supper

17-18. What I'm going to say next is not praise. Your Communion services are hurting you more than they are helping you. You begin with a fellowship dinner. But I hear that there are differences among you at that time.

19-20. Some of you know God better than others. While it's good to discuss scriptural insights, Communion is not the time to argue over theology.

21-22. At these potluck dinners you eat without waiting for others. Some of you take what you brought and eat heartily while poor members go hungry. If you want to stuff yourselves, do it at home, not in church. Do you expect me to praise you for doing this? I will not.

23-24. Let me tell you how to cele-

brate the Lord's Supper. The night before Jesus died, He took a loaf of flat bread, blessed it, and broke it in half. Then He passed it to the disciples on both sides of Him and said, "Break off a piece for yourself. As you eat, think of this bread as My body, which is broken for you."

25-26. He then took a cup of grape juice and blessed it. He passed it to His disciples and said, "Sip it and think of how I shed My blood for you. Every time you do this, remember what I have done for you. And as you do this, you're pointing to My death until I come back."

27. Anyone who takes part in the Lord's Supper in a way that dishonors Him and what He has done for us is sinning. He is taking away the importance of the body and blood of Jesus.

28. Before taking part in Communion, you should examine your heart. Make sure your sins are forgiven and apologize to those you have hurt. Resolve to follow Jesus. Then celebrate Communion together.

29. Anyone who doesn't respect what the bread and grape juice in Communion stands for is hurting himself spiritually.

30-32. Maybe it's because of your gluttony that some of you are so listless and sick. Others have gone to an early grave. If you would discipline yourselves, the Lord wouldn't have to do it. When He does, He does it to help you so that you won't be judged and destroyed with the wicked.

33-34. So listen to me. When you have your fellowship dinners, be kind and courteous to everyone. If you can't wait to eat, then go home. Don't make God discipline the whole church because of a few of you. I'll give you more instructions when I come.

Spiritual Gifts

12 Now let me say something about spiritual gifts. Before you gave your hearts to Jesus, you were worshiping idols and did some very bad things. No one who is led by the Holy Spirit will turn against Jesus. And no one can accept Jesus as Lord without the Holy Spirit.

4-7. The Holy Spirit gives different spiritual gifts in the church. There are many ways to serve Jesus, because people have different abilities. Each one should use his ability for the good of the church. This shows whether or not he has the Holy Spirit.

8-9. To one, the Holy Spirit gives the ability to speak with wisdom, to another to speak with knowledge. To some He gives great faith to do special things for God, and to others He gives the gift of healing. But all these gifts come from the same Holy Spirit.

10-11. One person may be given the power to work miracles, while another receives the gift of prophecy. Others can detect the presence of evil spirits, and still others are given the gift of languages. All these gifts are given by the same Holy Spirit. He decides whom to give them to and when.

The Church Works Like a Body

12. Our bodies have many parts, but we have only one body. That's the way the church is. It's like the body of Jesus living here on earth, with all its parts each working in different ways.

13. By the Holy Spirit we are baptized into that body. Once you're baptized, it doesn't make any difference who you are or where you came from. You're now part of the body of Jesus.

14-16. A person's body has many parts. Can you imagine a foot saying, "I'm not a hand, so I must not be part of the body"? Isn't it part of the body?

Or if an ear said, "I'm not an eye, so I must not be part of the body," isn't it part of the body?

17-18. If the whole body were an eye, how could we hear? If the whole body were one big ear, how could we smell? God put the body together so it can function the best way possible to serve Him.

19-21. If each part of the body were the same part, where would the body be? But God made our bodies to have many parts. We need each part. The eyes can't say to the hands, "I don't need you." Nor can the head say to the feet, "I don't need you."

22-24. Delicate parts of the body, such as our eyes, need to be protected, because they are very important. Our digestive organs are hidden away, but they get lots of attention, especially when we're hungry. Some parts we are careful to cover out of modesty. But the hands and feet don't need as much care.

25-27. There should be no differences in the church. All should care for one another. No member should be made to feel unnecessary. We need to work together with others for the good of the church. If all of us will do this, the church will be happy. The church is the body of Jesus on earth. Each one of you is part of that body and should work together with others.

28. Some of you, such as the apostles, help advance the church. Some have the gift of prophecy to guide the church. Others can teach. These are the three most important functions. Others can work miracles, heal the sick, help others, organize and lead, or speak in different languages.

29-31. Can everyone be an apostle? Is everyone a prophet? Does everyone know how to teach? Can everyone work miracles, heal, or speak different

languages? We don't all have the same gifts. It's not wrong to want more gifts to use for Jesus. But let me tell you about the best gift of all.

Love

13 If I could speak many different languages, including the language of angels, but didn't have love in my heart, I would sound only like a clanging cymbal.

2. If I could predict the future, knew all there was to know, and had lots of faith, but didn't have love in my heart, what good would I be?

3. If I gave everything I had to the church, used my money to feed the poor, and even died for Jesus, but did it without love in my heart, it would mean nothing.

4-7. Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous. It doesn't brag or show off. It's never rude. Love puts self last and others first. It doesn't get angry or remember wrongs. Love doesn't enjoy evil, but is happy about what is good and true. Love carries burdens, believes all things, always hopes, and never fails.

8-10. Love will last. One day prophecies will end. Earthly languages will be useless, and knowledge as we know it will vanish away. Compared to God, we know so little. Even prophecies give us only a glimpse of the future. When the end comes, prophecy will no longer be needed.

11. When I was a child, I thought as a child. But when I grew up, I thought as an adult. Now we understand things the way children do; then we will understand them the way we should.

12. It's also like looking in a cloudy mirror. Things are a little foggy. Now I know God through the Scriptures, but then I'll know Him face to face, just as He has known me all along.

13. There are three things that last forever: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

The Gift of Prophecy

14 So whatever gifts you have, remember to serve God and the church with love. Concerning gifts, I would say the gift of prophecy helps people the most.

2-4. For example, if one speaks in a language that no one understands except God, what good is it? But one who prophesies encourages and comforts people. The person who talks in a language no one understands is talking only to himself. But one with the gift of prophecy helps the whole church.

5. I wish all of you could speak different languages, but I would rather that you could prophesy. It's more useful than speaking different languages, unless someone is there to translate so that everyone can understand what is being said.

The Gift of Languages

6. If I spoke to you in a language you didn't understand, you might think it's a sign that I had the Holy Spirit. But would that help you? No. It could help you only if I spoke in your language and shared with you some things about God that would be helpful.

7-8. It's also true in music. If a musical instrument is played without a harmony of notes, what good is the music? It's just noise. But when the melody harmonizes, everyone is happy. It's the same on a battlefield. If the trumpet doesn't give a sound that the troops recognize, what good is it?

9-11. It's not just sounds that are important. People must understand what you are saying. There are many languages in the world. And they all have meaning. But if I don't know the lan-

guage, I won't understand what the speaker is saying.

12. You are so eager to have spiritual gifts. Then pray for gifts that will help the church grow stronger.

13. Why are you praying for the gift of tongues? Are you trying to show off that you have the Holy Spirit? If you claim to be speaking the language of heaven, you should also be able to interpret it.

14-15. In church if I pray in a language that no one understands, it might help me, but it doesn't help anyone else. So whether I pray or sing in church, I must do it in a language people understand. We need to use our heads as well as our hearts.

16-17. When you pray in other languages, how can people who don't understand say amen? Even if your prayers are sincere, people are not blessed by them.

18-19. Actually, I am able to speak in more foreign languages than any of you, because God gave me that gift. I'm thankful to Him for this gift because it helps me preach to more people. But in church I would rather say a few words you understand than thousands of words in a strange language.

20-21. You may sin innocently, like little children, but as Christians you need to act mature. In the Bible God says, "You won't listen to Me when I speak to you through prophets in your language. So I will let you be taken into captivity, where I will speak to you in the new language you had to learn. But even then you will not listen." So why should I speak to you in a language you can't understand?

22-23. The gift of languages was given to the apostles to reach unbelievers with the gospel. But the gift of prophecy is given to help the church. If during worship everyone who

claims to have the gift of tongues begins to talk in a different language, visitors will think you're mad.

24-25. Those who have the gift of prophecy guide the church and help members know how to live the Christian life. When visitors come, they can understand what is being said. They might even say, "These people really love God," and give their hearts to Jesus and become members.

An Orderly Church

26. So what should you do? When you come to church, one person sings, another teaches, another has a new truth from God, another speaks in a different language, while another interprets. All these gifts are given to help the church, not to show off.

27-28. If those who have the gift of languages insist on speaking, let only two or three speak in turn. Then someone should explain what is said. If you don't have an interpreter, let these people be silent in church and talk to God in their own language at home. God hears and understands.

29. The same with those who claim to have the gift of prophecy. Let only two or three speak in turn. Then those who have the gift of prophecy should decide whether these messages are from God or not.

30-31. If one is speaking and another claims to have an urgent message from God, let the first one step aside. By speaking one at a time the church is blessed.

32-33. If these speakers really have the gift of prophecy, they will listen to the Holy Spirit speaking to them through others who have it. God is a God of order, not of confusion. So orderliness is practiced in all our churches.

34. Another thing about orderliness: women should not interrupt the

speaker and shout, as they do in pagan temples. These new converts should be quiet and listen as we all do, and not disrupt the worship.

35. If a woman like that doesn't understand what the preacher said, she shouldn't interrupt the sermon with questions. Rather she should wait until she gets home and ask her husband. It's not polite to interrupt the service like that.

36. Let me ask you a question: Did your church originate the gospel? Are you the only people God has spoken to?

37-38. If a person claims to have the gift of prophecy, he will know that what I'm writing to you comes from God. If someone doesn't want to listen to me, then he's not speaking for the Lord.

39-40. So the best gift to ask the Holy Spirit for is the gift of prophecy, because it will help the whole church. But don't stop others from using their gifts. Just worship in a proper and orderly way.

The Good News Explained

15 My brothers and sisters, I want to say something else about the good news I shared with you. You accepted it, and because of Jesus you are saved. But you must hold on to what I taught you, or your faith will mean nothing.

3-6. I passed on to you the gospel I received. The fact is that Jesus died for our sins according to Scripture. He was buried and rose from the grave, as prophesied. He appeared to Peter, then to the apostles, and, after that, to more than 500 believers. Many of these are still living.

7-8. Next Jesus appeared to His stepbrother James, and then to all the disciples. Last of all He appeared to me and taught me as He did the apostles.

9-10. I don't deserve to be called an apostle, because before I met Jesus I persecuted His people. Only God's grace has made me what I am. Since accepting Jesus, I have worked harder for Him than anyone else. Yet it's not been me, but God working through me by His grace.

11. It's the truth about Jesus that's the foundation of your faith, no matter who brought the gospel to you.

Jesus Is Our Hope

12-15. If you believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection? If that were true, then Jesus would still be dead. And if Jesus were still dead, then our preaching is useless. And so is your faith. It would also mean that we lied to you about God.

16-18. If what some of you are saying about the resurrection is true, then Jesus would never have risen from the dead. And if Jesus is still dead, then we have no hope. We're still in our sins, and our dead loved ones will never live again.

19-20. If we can place our hope in Jesus only for this life, we deserve to be pitied more than anyone else. But Jesus did rise from the dead, which assures us that those who died believing in Jesus will also be resurrected.

21-22. Death came into the world through Adam, but life came into the world through Christ. Because of Adam's sin we all die, but because of Jesus those who believe will be resurrected from the dead to live forever.

23. First, Jesus had to be raised from the dead. Only then could He come back and raise from the dead all who belong to Him.

24-26. Afterward, the end will come. Jesus will destroy everything that is evil, all human power and authority.

Then He'll give this world back to God. It was God who put Jesus in charge of everything to begin with. He asked Jesus to destroy His enemies and to put an end to sin and death.

27-28. When the Scripture says, "Jesus is in charge of everything," that does not include God. For God is really the ruler over everything. One day Jesus will complete the work God gave Him to do. Death and sin will be destroyed. Then Jesus will be subject to God as He was before sin began, and God will be over all.

The Resurrection

29. If there's no resurrection, why get baptized at all? Why do it unless the dead will be resurrected?

30-31. Why do we foolishly put ourselves in danger? Every day there's some threat on my life. But when I think of what Jesus has done for you, I too am willing to die.

32. Why would I preach in Ephesus and endanger my life, as men do fighting wild beasts, if there is no resurrection? I might as well do like some who say, "Let's eat and drink and have a good time because death ends everything."

33-34. If you've been fooled into thinking that, wake up. "Bad friends ruin good character." Don't keep on sinning. Turn your life around. It's a shame that some of you don't really know God as you should.

35-38. Some like to argue, saying, "Have you ever seen a dead body come back to life?" They're not thinking right. Look at nature. When a farmer puts dead seeds in the soil, he expects them to come to life. God makes seeds sprout and grow, each after its own kind. Finally they produce new seeds.

39-41. In the animal kingdom there

also are different kinds of bodies. People, animals, birds, and fish all have different bodies. If you look at the sky, you see the same idea. The sun has its own kind of glory, and the moon and the stars each have their kind of glory and beauty.

42-43. When people die, their bodies are laid in the ground like seeds. At the resurrection those who love Jesus will come up with new bodies. Those bodies will be beautiful, healthy, and strong, and will never die.

44. People who die are buried. Their earthly bodies, like seeds, decay. But when Jesus comes, their human bodies will be raised in a glorious form to live in heaven.

45. As the Scripture says, "Adam was made out of the ground and was given life." But Jesus, the Second Adam, gives eternal life.

46-47. Our present bodies are made for this earth. But at the resurrection God will give us bodies fit for heaven. Adam's body was made for this earth, but Jesus is Lord of earth and heaven.

48-49. Everyone has an earthly body, but someday we will have a heavenly body. Just as now we are like Adam, so someday we will be like Jesus.

The Final Victory

50. What I'm trying to say is that graded bodies will not be in heaven. This body that dies cannot live in a place where there is no death. Our bodies will be changed.

51-52. Let me explain a mystery. Human bodies die and decay, but the bodies of those who believe in Jesus will not die forever. They will be changed at the blink of an eye. When the trumpet sounds, the dead will be raised. And those who are living will be changed. We will be given bodies that will live forever.

53-55. Our sinful mortal bodies will be replaced with sinless immortal ones. When that happens, then what the Scripture says will come true: "Death has been overcome! Oh, death, where is your sting? Oh, grave, where is your victory?"

56-57. Death came in because of sin. And sin came from breaking God's law. And sin came from breaking God's law. But our heavenly Father gives us the victory over sin and death through what Jesus has done.

58. Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, hold on to your faith. Don't be moved. Don't let anything change you. Do all that you can for Jesus. He won't forget what you do for Him.

An Offering for the Poor

16 Now let's talk about helping others. Some of our people need help. I've been collecting an offering from all the churches to take to our members in Jerusalem who are in need.

2. On the first day of each week, sit down at home and figure out how much you can give, depending on how God has prospered you. Have someone pick up the donations each week, so I won't have to collect the funds myself when I come.

3-4. Also, choose some men to take your donations to Jerusalem. When I come, I'll write letters of introduction for them. Whether or not I go with them depends on what the Lord wants me to do.

Paul's Plan

5-6. My plan is to come to see you after I go through Macedonia to see our members. Then I hope to spend the winter with you and get some needed rest. After that, you may send me on my way with better health.

7. I don't want to come now and then have to rush back here. I really want to spend some time with you unless Jesus has other plans for me.

8-9. But first I plan to spend a few months in Ephesus, because the doors of evangelism are opening up. I can't pass up this opportunity to preach the gospel, even though some people here are against me.

10-11. If Timothy comes before I do, make him feel welcome. He loves the Lord and works for the churches, as I do. So accept him, love him, and when he leaves, give him what he needs for his trip. I can't wait to see him and those with him.

12. As for Apollos, I'm encouraging him and his companions to stop to see you too. At first he didn't think it was a good idea, but finally he agreed to go as soon as possible.

A Final Word

13-14. In the meantime, be alert, stay on guard, and hold on to what you believe. Be strong and courageous. Do everything with love.

15-17. I'm happy that Stephanas and his family want to preach the gospel full-time. They were the first people in Greece to become Christians. Since then they've given all their time to strengthening our members wherever they go. Listen to them and encourage them and everyone who works with them.

18. I'm glad they stopped to see me. They did for me what you would do if you had been here. Tell them that they have been a real blessing.

19-20. The members here send their greetings, including Aquila and Priscilla and the group meeting at their house. Everyone sends their love. When you meet, greet each other as brothers and sisters should.

21. The greetings at the end of this letter I have written by my own hand. Yes, they are written by me, Paul.

22. If anyone doesn't love Jesus and keeps on living his old life of sin, don't

force him to become a member. O Lord, please come and put an end to sin.

23-24. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. I send my love to all who belong to Jesus.

2 Corinthians

INTRODUCTION: *This is Paul's second letter to the believers in Corinth. He wrote it about A.D. 58 from the city of Philippi. In this book Paul told the Corinthians how happy he was to learn that they had solved most of their problems. Then he invited them to be generous and take an offering for the poor believers in Palestine. In closing, Paul reminded them of his calling as an apostle, no matter what others said.*

Paul's Sufferings

1 Greetings from Paul, an apostle of Jesus by the will of God, and from Timothy, our brother in the ministry. This letter is not only for church members in Corinth but for all our churches throughout Greece. Grace and peace from God our Father and from Jesus Christ our Lord.

3-5. First, thanks to our heavenly Father, who is most gracious and kind. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we know how to comfort others. Just as God comforted Jesus when He suffered, so God comforts us when we suffer.

6-7. What we went through was for your sake. When you saw how God helped us, it helped you. Now you'll have courage when you're faced with the troubles we've had. We believe in you. And we know that when you're in trouble, God will help you also.

8-9. Let me share with you some of the problems we've had. Things were so hard here that we wondered whether we would make it through alive. Our strength was so far gone that we thought we would die. This made us lean on God even more. He has so much power that He can even raise the dead.

10-11. Many times He has saved our

lives. So we believe that He will continue to do so as long as He sees best. And you are helping us with your prayers. Someday people will be grateful to God for sparing us so that we could come and tell them about Jesus.

Paul's Confidence

12. It's by God's grace, not by our own wisdom, that we have lived by the truth we've taught you. Our conscience is clear.

13-14. Don't try to read between the lines from the letter I wrote earlier. There are no double meanings. As time goes on, you'll better understand. What a day of rejoicing it will be for all of us when Jesus comes.

15-18. My plan was to stop and see you before and after my trip to Macedonia. Then you could help me get ready for the trip to Judea. Once I make up my mind, I don't change it. That's how God is. You can depend on what He says.

19-20. Remember when Silas, Timothy, and I first told you about Jesus? We spoke with certainty. This is the same kind of certainty on which God's promises rest. We preach with power because of Jesus and do it to the honor and glory of God.

21-22. God has united our hearts in Jesus and has helped us stand firm wherever we go. He has placed His seal of ownership on us by putting the Holy Spirit in our hearts. This is like a down payment of what God has in mind for us when Jesus returns.

23-24. The reason I didn't come as I had planned was not that I changed my mind. I wanted you to take my letter to heart and make some changes in your lives, so I wouldn't have to discipline you. We don't want to force you to change, but to think about it and decide on your own to live out your faith, and do it happily.

Paul Asks for Forgiveness

2 I decided not to come right now because I didn't want to discipline you as before. That was painful. It hurt not only you, but also me. That's why I wrote to you the way I did. I wanted you to change on your own. I want our next meeting to be a happy one.

4. It was really hard not to come to you after I said I would. I cried as I wrote to you, not wanting to hurt you. I longed for you to know how much I love you.

5-6. When you hurt, I hurt too. So I don't want to say more about that member who caused you trouble. You disciplined him, and that's enough. He felt hurt, but that's what discipline does. When a church member sins publicly, the church needs to speak up. **7-8.** But now that it's over, you need to forgive and comfort him. I don't want him to get discouraged and turn away from Jesus. That's why it's important to love him.

9-11. I wrote to see if you would be the kind of Christians you should be. Whomever you forgive I will forgive. That's the way Jesus is, always ready

to forgive. He forgave me, so I forgive others. This is important so Satan doesn't gain a foothold in our church.

The Incense of Jesus

12-13. By the way, another reason I couldn't come to see you as I promised is that the Holy Spirit opened the way for me to go to Troas. So I went and preached the good news about Jesus. I thought Titus would come and help me. Finally I had to finish the meetings myself. Then I left to preach in other places that were ready to listen.

14-15. Thanks be to God. He helps us spread the good news about Jesus wherever we go. Learning about Him is like breathing sweet-smelling perfume. When we hold meetings, God uses us as He did Jesus to spread this fragrance. Some listeners are being saved, and some are being lost.

16. The gospel brings eternal life to those who are being saved. But it will bring eternal death someday to those who refuse to accept it. What a responsibility is ours!

17. We are not like some preachers who twist God's word. We preach the truth sincerely, as if God were right there with us.

Living Letters

3 Does it sound as if we're boasting? Do we need letters of introduction from you? Your changed lives and love of Jesus is our introduction that everyone can read. In this sense you are letters given to us by Jesus, not written with pen and ink, but by the Holy Spirit on your hearts.

4-5. Our trust is in God because of what Jesus has done for us. We are able to do this important work only through the power of God.

The Cross

6. He made us ministers of a new agreement. Keeping the law can't give you life. It can only tell you what sin is. It's the Holy Spirit who gives life.

7-8. At Sinai God wrote the law on stone and gave it to Moses. When he came down from the mountain, his face was shining with the glory of God. It was so bright that the people couldn't look at him, but it faded away. If you compare the law written on people's hearts with the law written on stone, isn't the law in the heart much better?

9-11. If the promises about Jesus to the people of Israel were wonderful, how much greater is the gospel now that those promises are fulfilled? Because of His sacrifice on the cross, the old system of sacrifices, with its promises, ended. If the old was glorious, the new is better because it will last forever.

12-13. That's why we can preach with such confidence, because of the hope that Jesus gave us. So our message is much better than that of Moses. The glory of God was with him, and the light on his face was so bright that he had to cover his face. But that glory has given way to the glory of the cross.

14. Many Israelites still hold on to the glory of Moses, as if they had a veil over their faces. When they read the Old Testament, they can't see things clearly. Only when we look at Jesus can we understand the old promises as we should.

15-16. Every Sabbath they read a scripture about what Moses said. But they refuse to see the connection with Jesus Christ. Their stubbornness is like a veil that keeps them in the dark. If they would open their hearts to God's promises about Jesus, they would understand how all this fits together.

17-18. Wherever the Holy Spirit is, there is freedom. The veil is gone. We look at Jesus on the cross and are changed to be like Him, as the Holy Spirit works on our hearts.

Preaching About Jesus

4 Since God in His mercy has given us the work of sharing the good news, we will not get discouraged or give up.

2. As ministers of the gospel we don't twist what the Bible says. We preach and teach the truth. Then we let others judge our lives. They can see what we are in God's sight.

3-4. If the gospel is hard to understand, it's because people close their minds to it. Such will be lost. Their minds have been blinded by Satan. He keeps them from studying the Scriptures, so the light of the gospel doesn't reach their hearts. He doesn't want them to know Jesus.

5-6. We're preaching not about ourselves, but that Jesus is Lord. We're only His messengers. In the beginning God said, "Let there be light." Today He is using that same power to make the light of the gospel shine in people's hearts.

Paul Is Not Discouraged

7-9. We're like clay jars filled with the gospel. The power of the gospel is from God and not from us. Everywhere we go we have trouble, but we're not discouraged. We can't always explain why things happen, but we're not crushed. We're persecuted, but God is with us. We're knocked down, but we get up and keep going.

10-12. We have faced death for Jesus many times and have scars on our bodies to prove it. But we're still alive, which shows the power of God. We're threatened with imprisonment and

death, but Jesus gives us strength. While our lives are at constant risk, we bring you promise of a new life.

13-14. David said, "I believed, so I said it." That's why we speak, because we believe. We know that if we're killed, God will raise us from the dead, as He did Jesus. He will present us and you to the whole universe as trophies of His victory.

15. We are trying to help you stay close to Jesus. As the gospel goes to more and more people, abundant praise goes back to God.

16-17. We don't give up. Even though our bodies are growing weaker, our spiritual power is renewed every day. Compared to what God has in mind for us, our troubles are nothing. What we're doing brings us eternal blessings that far outweigh what is happening to us now.

18. We're looking not at things we can see, but at things we can't see. What we see is temporary and will be destroyed. But what we can't see will last forever.

New Bodies

5 Our body is like a tent that we live in. When we die, it's taken down and folded up. But God has a new body for us, a house to live in. That body will be for heaven, where we will live forever.

2-4. We're tired of suffering and wish for that heavenly body. If we could move into it now without dying, we would. But since we have this earthly body, we do the best we can. Don't get the idea that I want to die. It's just that a heavenly body would give us so much more strength and energy, and we would live forever.

5-6. God's plan for us is still the same. He gave us the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that He will follow His original plan and give us bodies fit for heaven. That's why

we can speak with such confidence, even though we are not yet in heaven.

7-8. We live by what we believe and not just by what we see. This gives us courage to look ahead. We know that Jesus will come and that we will go home to live with Him forever.

9-10. Our aim is to please God, whether we're here or in heaven. We show that we love Him by obeying Him. Jesus will look at what we have done, whether it was good or bad. Then He will give us our reward.

God's Love

11-12. Knowing all this, we try to persuade people to do right. God knows this, and we hope that you will see us in the same way. We're not trying to say that we are good, but to give you an answer for those who criticize us. They judge us by how we appear instead of looking at our hearts.

13-15. If it looks as if we're out of our minds, we're doing it for the Lord. The truth is that we're doing it for you. It's the love of Jesus that keeps us going. We're thinking not about ourselves, but about His life and death and what He did for us.

16-17. That's why we no longer look at people's appearances as we used to, but at how valuable they are to Jesus. Anyone who has been born again is a new creation. Old values are gone, and new ones have come.

18-19. All this is from God. He has changed us from being against Him to being for Him. Now that we're His friends, He has given us the privilege of inviting others to be His friends too. Through Jesus He brought the whole world close to Himself. He is not condemning us for our sins, but has given us this wonderful message to share with others.

20-21. As God's ambassadors we

plead with you to be reconciled to God. Jesus, who was innocent, died for our sins so that we could be made right with God through Him.

Hardships

6 We are workers together with God. Now that you have accepted Jesus, don't let it be for nothing. As God said through Isaiah the prophet, "I have answered your prayers and have offered you salvation." Now is the time to give your heart to Jesus and be saved.

3-4. We don't want to offend you or have our ministry be a stumbling block to you. We want to be servants of God. We are willing to go through all kinds of hardships so that you can be in heaven with Jesus.

5-6. We have been whipped, put in prison, and attacked by mobs. We have worked until we were exhausted, have had many sleepless nights, and have often gone without food. We have lived pure lives, preached the gospel, and been patient and kind to people everywhere. We did all this in love through the power of the Holy Spirit.

7. We did it through the truth and by the power of God. We do it by using the armor of Jesus' righteousness to protect us on the right hand and on the left.

8-10. Some people say good things about us, while others say bad things. Some say that we are lying when we're telling the truth. We've been treated both as foreigners and friends. We've been close to death, yet we're still alive. We've had a lot of sadness, yet we're always happy. Although we are poor, we make many rich. We have nothing, yet in Christ we have everything.

11-13. My friends, we have opened our hearts to you as to no other con-

gregation. We still love you, but it seems that you have stopped loving us. I'm speaking to you as if you were my children. Please open your hearts to us as we have to you.

Live for Jesus

14-15. Remember that you're different from unbelievers. Don't be like them. What does light have to do with darkness? What does Jesus have in common with the devil? What does a true believer have in common with a nonbeliever?

16. Is there no difference between God's Temple and a temple full of idols? You are God's temple. The Lord said, "I will live in them and walk with them. I will be their God, and they will be My people."

17-18. God also said, "Come out of the world. Don't do what the world does, and I will take you in. I want you to be part of My family. I will be your Father, and you will be My sons and daughters." This is the invitation given to you by God Himself.

Paul's Joy

7 My dear friends, since God gave us all these promises, let's stay away from things that hurt our bodies, minds, and hearts. Let's live better lives for Jesus.

2-4. Please open your hearts to us. We haven't wronged you, hurt you, or cheated you. I'm not blaming you for anything. We really love you. Just as we're willing to live for you, we're willing to die for you. I have a great deal of confidence in you. I'm proud of you. Even with all our hardships, you make me very happy.

5-6. Since we arrived in Macedonia we've had no rest. There's been trouble everywhere. Besides the threats of violence, we have had to worry

about you. But God has not forgotten us. He always gives us courage when we need it most. Titus' coming has been a real blessing.

7. He told us how kind you were to him and that many of you are sorry for the way you acted. Now you're looking forward to seeing me. This has made me very happy.

8-9. Even though the letter I sent you earlier made you feel bad, I'm no longer sorry that I wrote it. At the time I knew it would hurt you, and I was worried. Now I'm happy, because the Holy Spirit has helped you change your ways.

10. When people are sorry for what they have done, they repent and determine not to do it again. But repentance that doesn't lead a person away from sin isn't from heaven.

11. Now look at what it has done for you. You're sorry that you sinned, and you don't want to sin again. So you determined to do what's right. That's good. Now you're ready to discipline those members who publicly sin and embarrass the church.

12. When I wrote to you before, I asked you to do this, and now you did it. This shows how much you love God and how committed you are to do what's right.

13-14. That gave us courage. Titus told us even more good things about you. When we saw how happy he was, we knew that your kindness to him and your repentance were real. When he first asked me about you, I told him what wonderful people you are. And you didn't disappoint me. Everything I told him proved true.

15. He loves you even more because of your eagerness to accept him as one sent by God, and to follow his suggestions.

16. I'm so happy to know that I can fully trust you.

Helping Other Believers

8 Let me share with you what God's grace has done for our people in Macedonia. The members here have had their faith severely tested, yet they are full of joy in the Lord. Although they are very poor, they have given generously to help others.

3-4. I saw them giving more than they could afford. They even begged us to accept their donations to help the poor members in Israel.

5. Why would they do this? First, they gave their hearts to Jesus. Then, to show their love for Him, they gave what they could. Such love makes God really happy.

6-7. Since Titus started the offering there, we are letting him go back to help you finish this work. You do so well in many things. Your faith is strong; you're educated, full of enthusiasm for the Lord, and ready to speak for Him. Now we want you to be known as generous givers, too.

8-9. This is not a command. But it would be one way to show other members how much you love them. Remember, Jesus owns the whole world. Yet for our sakes He became poor so that we might become spiritually rich.

10-11. So I'm suggesting that you take advantage of this opportunity to give what you can. You started to do this a year ago, but never finished collecting it all. Why not finish it? Be as eager to do this as you were when you started it. Take the funds you have and go on from there.

12-13. If you're willing to give what you can, God will accept it as your gift of love, whether it's much or little. I

don't want you to feel that you have to give more than other churches. That's not what I have in mind.

14. But because you have more than most of our churches do, we want you to have a part in this offering. If the time ever comes when you need help, they will help you.

15. This idea of equal sharing is in Scripture, where it says, "Those who gathered lots of manna could not store it, and those who didn't gather enough had all they needed."

Titus

16-19. How thankful we are that God put in Titus' heart the same love for you that we have. It was his idea to go back to you, because he wants to include you in the offering. So I'm letting him go, and sending a brother from here with him. The churches chose him because he's honest, has a good reputation, and preaches well.

20-21. We're very careful to avoid any criticism in the way we handle all this money. We want to do right in the sight of God and in the sight of man.

22. In addition to these two men, I agreed for a third brother, who has a reputation of being very careful with money, to go along. He is honest in everything he does. He's heard the good things I said about you, so he wanted to go along to meet you.

23-24. Titus is my partner in the Lord, and he'll be a blessing to you, as he was before. If people ask about the other two men, tell the members that they are faithful believers and represent the churches here. This will give you a chance to prove to them how genuine your love is and that what we told them about you is true.

A Love Offering

9 I don't need to tell you more about this offering going to our members in Israel. I know you're ready and eager to help, and that's all that matters. That's what I told the churches here about you last year. And your enthusiasm to give helped most of them to give even more.

3-4. I'm sending these men ahead of us to make sure you are ready. Later, when I come with some other brothers to pick up the offering you collected, it will be ready. We don't want to be embarrassed to learn that you didn't finish what you started.

5. That's why I've urged these men to go on ahead to help finish the collection you started a year ago. Then those who are with us can see that you did all this because of your love for our members in Jerusalem.

Cheerful Giving

6-7. Remember, the person who plants only a few seeds will have a small harvest. But if he plants lots of seeds, he will have a large harvest. So let each one think about how much to give. The offering should come from the heart, not grudgingly or because he has to. God loves it when His people give willingly and cheerfully.

8-9. He is able to give you back more than you need. He'll return it to you, either in ordinary things or in spiritual blessings, so that you'll have enough to help support and encourage every good work. As the Bible says: "He who gives to help those in need will soon develop a habit of doing right that will never stop."

10-11. Not only did God make seeds for the farmer to sow, but He also makes the seeds grow. He'll do the same thing with your offerings. They will produce a great spiritual harvest.

He will bless you as you bless others. And your giving will make others thank God for your kindness.

12-13. Your offering will not only help our poor brothers and sisters in Israel, but will produce a grateful, generous spirit in others. God will be honored. Your offerings are proof of your love for our brothers and sisters, your loyalty to Jesus, and your oneness with fellow believers everywhere.

14-15. Your brothers and sisters will thank God for the grace they see working in you, and will pray for you. All of us thank God for His great gift of love and grace, which we certainly did nothing to deserve.

Paul Defends Himself

10 I want to say something as kindly and gently as possible. Some of you say that when I'm away from you I like to write strong and harsh letters, but that when I'm with you I'm as weak and meek as a lamb.

2-3. My prayer is that when I come I will not have to be as strong with you as I have been in my letters. Some of you still think like the world. Well, we have no intention of acting like that.

4-6. Our weapons are spiritual. They are not the weapons of the world. They come from God. With His help we destroy all arguments against Him and bring all pride into obedience to Jesus. If we have to discipline you, we will, so that your obedience to Him will be complete.

7-8. Those who criticize me are looking at my physical appearance. Is that what makes them think they can stand up against me? They need to think twice, because we belong to Jesus too. I could tell you about the authority God gave me to help you. It was given me to strengthen you, not to hurt you.

9-11. I'm not trying to scare you with my letters. Some say, "In his letters Paul sounds powerful. But when you talk to him, he doesn't impress you. He's not a very good speaker." They need to realize that we can be just as forceful when we're with you as when we write to you.

12. We're not going to make great claims about ourselves such as those who think they are better than we are. They like to compare themselves among themselves and measure others by themselves. That's not wise.

13. Rather than bragging, we're going to talk about what God wants us to do. This includes sharing the gospel with you and giving you courage.

14-15. We didn't go to places where the gospel had already been preached. We were the first to bring it to you. We didn't take credit for work that someone else did. You know the work that we have done for you. Now we expect you to grow in your love for Jesus and to help spread the gospel.

16. We would like your church to be a home base from which you can send missionaries and workers to new places. I don't want anyone to accuse me of trying to expand my work into another man's territory.

17-18. The Scripture is clear when it says, "If anyone wants to glory, let him glory in the Lord, not in himself." God doesn't honor those who praise themselves, but He praises those who honor Him.

Paul's Concern

11 At this point, let me sound a little foolish and tell you how I feel about you.

2-3. First, I'm very jealous over you. I want to keep you for Jesus. When you were baptized, you were set aside as a pure bride to be married to Jesus

when He comes. But I'm worried that you're turning away from Him and forgetting who you are. Satan is tricking you the same way he did Eve by taking your mind off Jesus

4-6. Some are preaching about a different Jesus than we do. They say things about the Holy Spirit that are not true. They even give you a different interpretation of the gospel. Yet you listen to them as if they were apostles. I'm no less an apostle. I might not speak as well as they do, but I know what we taught you is true. **7-9.** Did I do wrong by going hungry so that you didn't have to pay me for bringing you the gospel? I accepted support from other churches while serving you. When I was in need, church members from Macedonia helped me so that I didn't have to bother you. I didn't ever want to be a burden to you.

10-11. No one in Greece or anywhere else will stop me from preaching the gospel free of charge. Why? Because I didn't love you? God knows how much I love you.

12-13. The reason was to stop those who claim to be apostles, saying that their work is the same as ours. That's not true. They're lying. They pretend to love you, but they're not real apostles. They just want to get all they can out of you.

14-15. This shouldn't surprise you. Satan was once an angel of light, and he can still appear as such. So it's no great thing if those who are influenced by him can make themselves look like servants of God. But someday they'll reap the consequences.

Paul's Apostleship

16-17. I want to say it again. You mustn't think that I don't know what I'm talking about. This might sound

like I'm bragging. I know that Jesus wouldn't talk this way, but for your sakes I have to say it.

18-19. There are so many bragging about what they've done for God; let me brag a little too. And since you listen to what fools tell you, let me be a fool and tell you what I've done. Then hopefully you'll be able to tell the difference between those who are real apostles and those who are not.

20. You have been very patient with people who have taken advantage of you. They look down on you, and even slap you in the face when you disagree with them.

21. Maybe I'm too gentle and kind to you. Perhaps I should act as they do. Wait. How did I end up talking like this? But now that I've started, let me finish.

22. Are these people who brag so much Hebrews? Well, so am I. Do the promises God gave to Israel belong to them? They belong to me, too. Is Abraham their ancestor? He's mine, also.

23. Have they accepted Jesus, and are they serving Him? This is foolish for me to say, but I'm more of a servant than they are. I've worked harder for Jesus than any of them. I've been beaten for my faith. I was arrested and put in prison many times. I can't recall how many times I've almost died.

24-25. Five times I was given thirty-nine lashes by my own countrymen. Three times I was beaten with a rod by the Romans. Once I was dragged out of town by a mob, stoned, and left for dead. I've been in three shipwrecks. In one I spent all day and night just trying to stay afloat.

26. On my many travels I've been in danger of losing my life from floods, robbers, and fellow Jews. Idol worshippers threatened me because I took away their business. I had to face

threats in cities, in the country, on ships, and even from false believers.

27. There have been hours of exhausting work, often without sleep. I've suffered hunger and thirst. Often I had no place to stay and not enough clothes to keep warm.

28-29. In addition to all this, I had the worry of all the churches on my mind. When I hear that a member is beginning to lose his hold on Jesus, don't you think I feel it? When someone goes back to his old life of sinning, don't you think it hurts me?

30-31. Now that I've already said so much about myself, let me tell you something that will give my enemies another chance to say how small and weak I am. God knows that I'm not lying when I tell you this.

32-33. When I was preaching in Damascus, the governor ordered me arrested. They closed the city gates and put guards there. Fellow believers helped me get into a basket and lowered me to the ground over the wall. So I escaped.

Paul's Vision

12 I shouldn't keep on talking the way I am, but let me tell you about the visions I've had.

2. About fourteen years ago Barnabas came to Tarsus looking for me and took me to Antioch. By then I had already been preaching for about seven years. One day I was taken to heaven in vision. There I saw Jesus. Whether I was there physically or just in vision I couldn't tell. It was all so real. To this day only God knows.

3-4. Let me say it again. How it happened I don't know; only God knows. What I saw and heard in Paradise words can't describe. How I wish I could speak the language of heaven so I could tell you! But even if I could,

I'm not allowed to tell you all that I saw and heard.

5-6. I could boast about being honored by God through visions. But I'm not going to, except to say how small and weak I felt. If I told you about my visions, I would be telling the truth. But there are always some who would say that I'm proud.

7. God knows how easy it is for a man to become proud. So He gave me poor eyesight from the time Jesus first appeared to me on the road to Damascus. It's been like a thorn in my body that I can't get rid of. Satan uses it to try to discourage me. But God has used it to keep me humble and dependent on Him.

8-9. Three times I begged Jesus to heal me, because I needed my eyes to get around better to work for Him. Each time He said, "My grace is all you need. My power is best seen when you are weak." So now I'm thankful for poor eyesight so that the power of Christ may work through me.

10. This may sound strange, but I'm happy to have weaknesses, insults, sufferings, and all kinds of trouble. This keeps me humble, and people can see the power of Jesus Christ instead of me. So even though I am truly weak, in Christ I am strong.

11. Now I feel like a real fool for having told you all this. In a way I was forced into it in order to help you. If people had accepted my apostleship, I wouldn't have said anything. But I wanted you to know that my calling is not inferior to those who brag so much about being apostles.

12. The miracles Jesus did through me should have been evidence enough of my apostleship. I did them without show, to prove they were of God.

13. You received everything the other churches did. The only way I treated you differently was by not asking you

to help support me. If that was wrong, forgive me!

Paul's Love

14. If I count my previous letter as a visit, I'll be ready to visit you a third time. I want to tell you ahead of time that I won't ask you for any financial help. I'm not interested in what you have, only in you. After all, children don't support parents, but parents support children.

15-16. I will gladly do all I can for you, but it seems that the more I love you, the less you care about me. You say that I wasn't honest because I didn't tell you all about myself and my problems. I did not want to burden you by talking about myself. But I told you about Jesus, and with the bait of the gospel I caught you.

17-18. Tell me, did I ever take advantage of you? And when I sent Titus and the other men to see you, did they try to cheat you? Didn't they act the same way toward you as I had?

19. Perhaps you're thinking that we've been defending ourselves all along. Not true. I'm talking straight with you because I consider you my friends. God knows that everything we say and do is to help you.

20. I'm doing this because when I come, I'm afraid you won't be the way I want you to be. And you probably won't find me to be the way you want me to be. I'm afraid that I might find arguing, jealousy, anger, gossiping, pride, and general confusion in the church.

21. If that happens, God will use it to humble me in front of you as I cry. My heart will really hurt for those who have slipped back into living impure lives, getting drunk, and doing the bad things they did before.

Paul's Warning

13 When I come, it will be the third time I've talked to you about all this. But this time I want everything you tell me proved by two or three witnesses. As I told you before, I will not excuse anyone who is living in sin.

3. If you want proof that Jesus is working through me, He'll show you His power. He is not weak when it comes to sin.

4. It's true that Jesus let Himself be crucified. But He rose from the grave with power. Yes, we're weak; but connected with Jesus, we're strong. God will enable us to help you.

5-6. Examine yourselves to see if you're really being faithful. If you can't tell that Jesus is among you, then you have failed the test. I hope that when we come, you will see that we have not failed the test but are living for Him.

Paul's Prayer

7-8. I want you to know I'm praying that you will change, but not just to please us. Do good because it's right. Truth never changes. We will do what's right even though your lives look as if we have failed. Our responsibility is to uphold the truth and bring you together, not to undermine the truth and tear you apart.

9-10. We're glad to be weak so you can be strong. We pray that you will grow even stronger in Christ. Heaven has tremendous power waiting to help you. I don't want to speak sharply to you. But the Lord has given me authority to help you, not to destroy you.

Greetings

11. Now I must say goodbye. Continue to grow in Jesus so that you can be strong in Him. God will help you. Encourage each other. Make an honest

effort to live in peace. May God's love and peace be with you.

12-14. Give everyone a brotherly hug for me. All the members here send

their greetings. May the love of God the Father, the grace of Jesus, and the presence of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. Amen.

Galatians

INTRODUCTION: *This letter was written by Paul to believers in the region of Galatia. He wrote it about A.D. 58 from the city of Corinth. Paul warned them not to listen to people who were saying that they must work to earn God's love. God loves us. That's why He sent Jesus to die for us. From this book we learn how important it is to keep our eyes on Jesus.*

Jesus Calls Paul

1 This letter is from Paul, an apostle. I was not called into the ministry by the disciples or by anyone else, but was called into the ministry by Jesus Himself and by God the Father.

2-5. All who are with me send their greetings. Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. It was Jesus who died for our sins to free us from this world of wickedness. This was the plan of God, to whom honor and praise belong forever and ever.

6-9. I'm surprised that you have so quickly forgotten that you're saved by grace. You are now listening to a false gospel. Some people are trying to confuse you by telling you things about Jesus Christ that are not true. Whoever is doing this, let him be condemned. Yes, if anyone preaches a different way to be saved, let him be doubly condemned.

10. Do you think I'm trying to please men or God? If I pleased men, then how could I claim to be an apostle of Jesus Christ?

11-12. The good news I brought to you is not something I just thought up. I didn't get it from anyone, and no one taught it to me except Jesus Himself.

13-14. You've heard my story before. You know how zealous I was for the Jewish faith, even persecuting those who believed in Jesus. I was determined to wipe them out. I had more zeal for the Jewish faith than anyone else my age. I was ready to defend my faith no matter what.

15-16. But God had other plans for me, even before I was born. In His own time He called me into the ministry. Why? Because He wanted me to take the good news about Jesus to non-Jewish people like you.

17. I didn't go to Jerusalem and talk to the disciples about this. But from Damascus, where I was converted, I went straight into the Arabian desert and lived there for three years. After that, I came back to Damascus and started preaching.

18-20. Then I went to Jerusalem. For two weeks I stayed with Peter so that he could tell me more about what Jesus did. I didn't talk to anyone else, except James, Jesus' stepbrother. This is the truth.

21-24. After seeing Peter and James, I left Jerusalem and returned to my home in Tarsus. I didn't stop at any churches along the way to talk to any of the local elders. When believers heard that the one who had per-

secuted them was preaching the gospel, they were amazed. They couldn't believe it, but then they praised God.

Paul and the Gospel

2 I didn't visit Jerusalem again for fourteen years. This time I went with Barnabas and Titus to attend the church conference.

2. I went because God told me to. When we arrived, Barnabas and I met privately with the disciples and church leaders. We told them how we were preaching the gospel to non-Jews. I didn't want them to believe any false rumors about me.

3. While we were there, not one of the church leaders complained that Titus, a Greek, wasn't circumcised.

4-5. But later some came to spy on us to see how much freedom we were giving new converts. They thought that every convert should accept the Jewish faith first and then become Christians. But we didn't give in to their demands. We wanted the truth of the gospel to stay with you.

6-8. The apostles didn't tell us to add anything to the gospel. And they had no problem with my preaching. They knew that God wanted me to work for those who were not Jews, just as Peter's mission was to work for the Jews. And the same power worked in my ministry as in his.

9. James, Peter, and John, the three top leaders of the church, realized what my mission was. They agreed that we should work for those who are not Jews, and that they would work for the Jews, as they had been doing. We shook hands, and they welcomed us into the ministry.

10. The only thing they asked us to do was to remember the poor, those who had lost everything by becoming

Christians. We had already done that and were glad to continue.

Paul and Peter

11. Sometime later Peter came to visit us in Antioch. It was there that I had to confront him publicly because what he was doing was wrong.

12. When he first came to Antioch he visited and ate with our new converts. Then some men claiming to be sent by James on official church business came from Jerusalem. They said that our converts must follow certain Jewish customs before they could be real Christians. Peter didn't want to get in trouble with these men, so he stopped eating with the new converts.

13-14. Soon some Jewish believers were doing the same thing. Peter's influence was so strong that even Barnabas changed. When I saw what was happening to the gospel, I decided to confront Peter publicly. "You're a Jew, but you've been living as though you're not. Why would you make others live like Jews?" Then Peter admitted that he was wrong.

15-17. Even though we were born Jews, we know that in God's sight we are all sinners. All of us are saved by believing what Jesus did for us on the cross. That's how we're made right with God, not by our Jewish rituals. To think otherwise is to believe a false gospel.

18-19. If I said that new converts had to become Jewish before they could be Christians, I would be preaching what I gave up. What Jesus did would be meaningless. Keeping Jewish laws can't save me. I have to look to Jesus for salvation, not to myself.

20. I have been crucified with Christ, so I no longer live, but Jesus lives in me. The life I now live is a life of faith in the One who loved me and gave His life for me.

21. God's grace is a gift. If we could earn His grace by keeping Jewish laws, then Jesus died for nothing.

Faith Is What Counts

3 How foolish can you Galatians be! Who told you that you had to become a Jew before you could be made right with God? Didn't we tell you what Jesus did for us? We described it in such detail that you felt as if it had happened right in front of you. 2-3. Tell me this: Did the Holy Spirit change you because you followed Jewish practices, or because you gave your hearts to Jesus? How are you so foolish as to think after giving your heart to Jesus that you now have to become a Jew to be saved?

4-5. Does what you have gone through for Jesus mean nothing? Did the Holy Spirit change your life because you kept the Jewish laws, or because you had faith in Jesus?

6-7. When God called Abraham, he believed what God said. That's why God called him righteous. Those who have that kind of faith are the true children of Abraham.

8-9. The Scriptures tell us that God saves those who have faith in Him, whether they are Jews or not. God told Abraham that through him the whole world would be blessed. This means that anyone who believes God as Abraham did can be saved.

Rules Can't Save

10. Those who depend on keeping rules to be saved are held prisoners by that law. Notice what the Bible says: "Unless you do everything exactly right all the time, you can't save yourself."

11-12. It's obvious that no one can do that. That's why the Bible tells us to live by faith, holding on to God.

Keeping rules to save ourselves is based not on faith but on works. You would have to have been perfect since you were born!

13. Since that's impossible, Jesus came and freed us from the law's penalty. He lived a perfect life of obedience and then died for our sins. He did this for us because the law says that sinners have no right to live.

14. Jesus died to give us the blessing that God promised Abraham years ago. This includes the promise that we also could receive the Holy Spirit by faith.

15-16. Let me illustrate. If a person makes a promise to someone, no one except the one who made that promise can change it. God promised that He would carry out His covenant promise, not through his descendants, but through one Descendant, that is, Jesus.

17-18. Notice that the Jewish rituals were given at Sinai years after Abraham. So the law couldn't change God's promise. Abraham's faith rested on God's promise, not on what he himself could do. God blessed Abraham because he believed what God had said.

19. So what was the purpose of these laws? The commandments show what sin is, and the Jewish rituals pointed to Jesus. When God came down to Sinai with thousands of angels, He needed a go-between to talk to the people. So He called Moses.

20. If only one side is writing an agreement, a go-between isn't needed. When God made a covenant agreement with His Son, it was like making it with Himself, because the two of them are one.

21. Does this mean that people don't need to obey because they're not involved in the agreement? Of course

not! We are to obey God. But He didn't give us His laws so we could save ourselves.

God's Solution

22-25. According to the Bible, everyone has sinned. But those who believe in Jesus will have eternal life. The Jewish sacrifices kept reminding us of what Jesus was going to do for us. They were like a teacher, pointing us to Christ, who would fulfill God's promise. Now we no longer need these Jewish laws and rituals.

26-28. Because of your faith, you're sons and daughters of God. Your baptism was a sign of this, as well as your commitment to live for Jesus. So it doesn't make any difference whether you're a Jew or not, whether you're a slave or free, or whether you're male or female. All of us are sinners, saved by Jesus Christ.

29. So if you belong to Jesus, then you are a spiritual descendant of Abraham's and are entitled to the blessings that God promised him.

A Second Illustration

4 Let me give you another illustration of what I mean. A child is legally entitled to his father's property. Because he's still a child, he's like a servant until he grows up. He has no authority, but is under teachers until his father decides.

3-5. In that sense the Jewish people are like that young son. We were not God's slaves, but were under certain laws that were like respected teachers to us. When the time came, Jesus was born and released us from those laws. He treats us as grown children. So we are part of God's family in heaven and on earth.

6-7. To show that you and I are part of the family of God, He sent the Holy

Spirit into our hearts. So now we can call God "Our Father," as Jesus told us to. You're free from ritual teachings. You are sons and daughters of God and heirs to all that God promised.

Paul's Concern

8-11. Before you knew God, you were slaves to false gods. So why would you want to be slaves to Jewish rules and regulations, and to religious holidays that are now outdated? I'm worried about you. Was my work for you all for nothing?

12. My dear friends, I would like you to put yourself in my place. I lived by Jewish rules, but not now. So do as I do. I place my faith in what Jesus has done for me. You were very kind to me on my first visit.

13-15. Remember how sick I was when I first came to preach to you? You took care of me as if I had been an angel or Jesus Himself. You were so happy, always talking about what God had done for you. You would have taken out your own eyes if you could have and given them to me.

16-17. What happened? Have I become your enemy because I told you the truth? Those other teachers are showing great interest in you because they want you to follow their teachings.

18-20. It's not wrong to be enthusiastic for a good cause even when I'm not there. But remember, you're my spiritual children. So I feel responsible for you. I feel as though I need to help you come to Jesus all over again. I wish I were there so you could hear the love in my voice, because I really care about you.

A Third Illustration

21-23. Those of you who believe that you have to keep all the Jewish ceremonies to be saved, do you really

understand what that means? Let's go back to the Bible. It says that Abraham had two sons. One was by his servant woman. That was Abraham's way of having a son. The other was by Sarah through a miracle to fulfill God's promise.

24. These things are filled with meaning. Each woman represents a different view of salvation. The servant woman represents the promises our people made to God at Sinai to be obedient. But they had no strength in themselves to keep God's law perfectly.

25-26. The servant woman also represents the city of Jerusalem. Many who live there think they can save themselves by keeping all the old rules and regulations. But Sarah represents the New Jerusalem in heaven, the one that God built. That city is a free city because it rests on God's promises, and we Christians belong to her.

27. As the Scripture says: "Sing, Jerusalem! You have been like a woman who couldn't have children, but by the power of God you now have lots of them."

28-29. Friends, you are the children of God because of God's promise, just like Isaac. Abraham's other son, born through human effort, persecuted the one born by the power of God.

30-31. So what happened? The Scriptures tell us that God told Abraham to send the first son and his mother away, for he was not the rightful heir. Because of our faith we are the spiritual children of Sarah, and not children of the servant woman.

Free in Jesus

5 Jesus has set us free from sin. So don't go back to doing rituals for salvation. If you depend on them to be saved, then what Jesus did for you means nothing. If you keep one

Jewish rule, then you need to keep all of them. If you try to be saved by works, you will have cut yourself off from the saving grace of Jesus.

5-6. The Holy Spirit helps us to believe in what Jesus did for us. We are just waiting for God to complete His plan. His love for us doesn't depend on Jewish rituals. The thing that's important to Him is that we love Him and believe what He says.

7-8. You were running a good race. Who cut in front of you to stop you from obeying the truth? God didn't tell them to do this.

9-10. Remember, it takes only a little yeast to make a whole batch of dough rise. So be careful what you listen to. But I trust that the Lord will help you hold on to Jesus. He will take care of the people who are trying to lead you in another direction.

11-12. Some of them tell you that I agree with them. If that were true, then why do they persecute me? It's because they don't really like the gospel. I wish they would quit troubling you.

13-15. My brothers and sisters, you are a free people. Jesus has saved you. But don't use that freedom to please yourself. Serve one another. Jesus told us to love our neighbor. If you keep arguing about the gospel, you'll destroy the unity you have.

16-18. Let the Holy Spirit direct your lives. Then you won't do what your sinful selves want. This is just the opposite of what the Holy Spirit wants. You can't do what you think is right. If you're led by the Holy Spirit, then you are not obligated to keep Jewish rituals.

19-21. The things that our sinful nature likes are clear: impurity, unfaithfulness, filthy language, idolizing wicked people or things, spiritualism,

hating people, making trouble, jealousy, outbursts of temper, selfishness, arguing, envying, getting drunk, having wild parties, and doing other wicked things that you already know about. Those who do these things will not be in God's kingdom.

22-23. But the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives will be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. There is no law that says these things are wrong.

24-26. Those who belong to Jesus will not live by their sinful human nature. Let us walk with the Holy Spirit and live the way He wants us to. Let's not be proud and keep arguing and causing trouble.

Helping Each Other

6 Brothers and sisters, one of your own members might do something wrong and get into trouble. In a kind, gentle way, help him come back to Jesus. Don't forget that you could slip away from Jesus too. So help each other, and you'll be doing what Jesus would do.

3-6. If someone thinks he's important when he really isn't, he's fooling himself. Each person should look at his own life and not compare himself with others. Let each one be responsible for his own actions. Those who have been taught the gospel should help their teacher spread the good news about Jesus.

7-9. Don't be deceived. God can't be fooled. Whatever a man sows he'll reap. If he lives by his sinful human nature, he'll reap eternal death. If he

follows the leading of the Holy Spirit, he'll reap eternal life.

10. So, as we are able, let's do all the good we can to help others, especially our own members.

Hold On to Jesus

11. The reason the handwriting is suddenly larger is that I'm writing these closing words myself.

12. Those who are trying to force rituals on you are doing so because they're afraid of certain Jews. They don't want to tell you the cross doesn't require Jewish rituals. If they did, they would be persecuted.

13. Have you noticed that those who do this are not honest? They don't keep all the rituals themselves. But they like to brag about how many of you they've convinced to keep them.

14-15. The only thing I want to brag about is Jesus. He loves me and died for me on the cross. Since I gave my heart to Him, I don't want to do the things the world does. God doesn't care whether we're Jewish or not. What matters to Him is that we're new people by being born again.

A Final Appeal

16-17. Peace and mercy to all God's people who live by the gospel of Jesus. Don't bring up this subject of being saved by Jewish rituals again. I have scars all over my body from beatings I got for bringing the true gospel to you.

18. Dear brothers and sisters, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you. Amen.

Ephesians

INTRODUCTION: *Paul wrote this letter to the Christians in Ephesus. He wrote it while he was a prisoner in Rome from A.D. 61 to 63. He reminded them how much God loved them and considered them part of His family. He talked to them about how to live for Jesus and how to have happy homes. From this book we learn what makes a church is not a building, but people who love and obey Jesus.*

God's Gift of Grace

1 This letter is from Paul, who was called by God to serve as an apostle of Jesus. It's to the faithful believers in Ephesus and to all others who love Jesus. May grace and peace from God our Father and from Jesus our Lord be with you.

3-4. Praise be to God our Father for all the spiritual blessings we have received through Jesus. Before this world was even created, God decided that those who believed in Jesus should be saved and stand without fault in His presence.

5-6. Because He loved us so, He decided to secure our future by adopting us as His children. This happened according to His plan through Jesus. Let us praise God for His wonderful grace that He gives us through His beloved Son.

7-8. Through Jesus we are forgiven and saved because of God's grace. He lavishes His grace upon us and gives us spiritual wisdom and understanding.

9-10. God let us know His secret plan, which He had made long ago. It's a plan centered in Jesus. When the time came, God carried it out and placed everything in heaven and earth under His Son.

11-12. It's because of Jesus that

God's plan to take us to heaven can be fully carried out. We were some of the first to accept Jesus as the Messiah, put our hope in Him, and live for His glory.

13-14. You too have placed your hope in Him after hearing the good news of the gospel. Then God placed His stamp of ownership on you by giving you the Holy Spirit. This is only the first installment of His promised gifts, which are for His praise and glory.

15-17. When I hear of the confidence you have in Jesus and how much you love each other, I can't stop thanking God for you. I pray that He will continue to give you spiritual wisdom and reveal more and more of Himself to you.

18. I pray that the eyes of your hearts will be enlightened. I want you to appreciate the future glory that God has in mind for you.

19-21. The tremendous power of God is available to all who believe. This is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him on the right hand of God. This puts Jesus above all rulers, authority, power, and titles that anyone has ever had.

22-23. God has placed everything under Jesus, including the church.

He is head of the church, and the church is His body on earth, which He fills with His spiritual presence.

Saved by Grace

2 In the past you were spiritually dead. You gave in to the prince of this world and did what everybody else did. Not only you, but all of us, have been influenced by Satan and have lived to please ourselves. We did what our bodies and our minds wanted to do. In that sense we were as sinful as anyone else.

4-7. But God's mercy and love are beyond understanding. When we were spiritually dead, He gave us a new life through Jesus. This was by grace alone. Spiritually He raised us from the dead and sat us next to Him in heaven with Jesus. He did this so that throughout eternity His grace and kindness can be seen.

8-9. It is by grace that we are saved, not because of anything we have done to deserve it. It's a gift from God that we accept by faith. We certainly can't brag about it as if we had earned it.

10. We are God's people because of His love and grace. Spiritually we have been born again and re-created because of Jesus. God wants us to follow Him and do the good things He would do.

Jesus Gives Us Peace

11-12. Do you remember when you were called ignorant by those who claimed to know God? In one sense, that was true. You didn't know God or the promises He had made to send His Son to die for us. You weren't citizens of His kingdom yet, but were foreigners without a future.

13-14. Once you were far away from God, but now you've been brought close to Him because of what Jesus did. He died for all of us, and by so

doing brought peace between all races and nationalities. He broke down the wall of hatred that divided us.

15-17. He did away with the requirements of the Jewish regulations that used to separate us. Jesus wants us to be one because He died to unite us. He brought peace to those who were close by, then sent us to take it to those far away.

18-19. Because of Jesus we can freely come to the Father through the Holy Spirit. You're no longer strangers and foreigners without a future. You're now citizens of heaven together with believers everywhere.

20. To use another example, you're like living stones that make up a beautiful temple. The foundation for this spiritual temple has been securely laid by what the apostles and prophets preached—Jesus Christ, God's great Cornerstone.

21-22. Each stone is laid to match up with Jesus for the glory of God. All of us are part of this growing temple in which God, through the Holy Spirit, lives.

God's Love

3 This is why I, an apostle of Jesus, was persecuted and imprisoned. I assume that you know how God extended His grace to me and called me into the ministry. He showed me things about His grace and His plan that were a mystery before. I wrote about this sometime ago.

4-6. When you read this letter, you'll understand the great love that Jesus has for you even better. In the past you didn't know all this, but now God, through the Holy Spirit, has shown His apostles and prophets that all people are included in His plan. Everyone can receive the promises we have in Jesus.

God's Purpose

7-8. I became a servant of Jesus by His grace, and was called to share the good news of salvation through the power of God. I am the least important of all God's people. Yet God called me to tell others what Jesus has done for them.

9. All this was never fully understood before. To think that the same God who created this world loved us so much that He would send His Son to come and save us!

10-12. It is God's purpose that through the church His wisdom will be better understood throughout the universe. Through Jesus we can see God's love for us. And because of our faith in what Jesus said and did, we can come to God without being afraid.

13. So don't become discouraged by my imprisonment. It will be for your good.

Paul's Prayer

14-17. For this reason I bow in prayer before our loving Father. The whole universe is His family. And all who believe are given the family name. I pray that He will strengthen you through the power of the Holy Spirit. And that Jesus will live in your hearts and you'll be rooted in His love.

18-19. I pray that you will more fully understand the length, breadth, depth, and height of God's love. I pray that you will experience the love of Jesus, which is beyond human comprehension, until your hearts overflow with gratitude to Him.

20-21. Our loving Father is able to do more for us than we can ask or think. His power in our lives can work miracles. To Him be glory in the church through Jesus Christ, to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

One Faith

4 As a prisoner of the Lord I appeal to you to live lives worthy of your high calling as followers of Jesus. Be humble, patient, and gentle, forgiving each other with love. Worship God in peace. Make every effort to stay united and be guided by the Holy Spirit.

5-6. There is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. There is one God and Father who is over everything and, through the Holy Spirit, is now in you.

Spiritual Gifts

7-10. In addition to all the blessings we have, God has also shown us His grace. He says in the Psalms that He would do this. Jesus came down from heaven to be one of us, and then went back to sit next to God, who put Him in charge of everything.

11-12. To some of us He gave the gift and responsibility of being apostles; to others, of serving as prophets. Others He gifted to be evangelists, pastors, or teachers. He has given many other gifts and responsibilities to His church to make it strong, and to equip it to carry out its mission.

13-14. These spiritual gifts help us to press together, hold on to our faith, and grow into mature followers of Jesus. These gifts will also keep our faith from being tossed back and forth like a cork on the waves. They will keep us from being spun around by every wind of teaching that comes along from men who make lies sound like truth.

15-16. But we have taught you the truth out of love, to help you become more like Jesus. We make up Christ's body here on earth, which is only as strong and healthy as each muscle is. We need to use our abilities to help the church grow and be strong.

17-19. I ask you in the name of Jesus not to live like the world, which has very different values. They don't understand, because they've hardened their hearts against God. They're not as sensitive to right and wrong as you are. They just keep on sinning.

20-24. This is not the way I taught you to live. I taught you the truth as it is in Jesus. So don't put your old self back on, which was taking you downhill. Give your hearts to Jesus every day and live for Him. This is what it means to be a new person in Jesus who was truly good.

The Holy Spirit

25-27. Stop lying to each other, because we all belong to the same family. If you become angry, don't let it make you sin. Even if you have a right to be angry, give the problem to Him before you go to sleep. Don't let the devil control you by bringing it back to your mind.

28. Those who steal should stop it. Let them find a job and pay back whatever they stole. Then let them help those in need.

29. Watch your language. Say things that help people and encourage them in their faith. That way, those who listen to you will become stronger.

30. Don't hurt the Holy Spirit. His presence is proof that you belong to God. The Holy Spirit will keep you from sinning and will get you ready for Jesus' coming.

31-32. Put away all bitterness, anger, gossip, and grudges. Instead, be kind and forgiving, just as God through Jesus has been kind and forgiven you.

Copy Jesus

5 In Jesus we see what God is like. As children imitate their parents, so you, as God's children, should

imitate Jesus. Walk in love and do good to others, as He did. His whole life was like a sweet incense to His Father.

3-4. Such things as greed, selfishness and immoral living have no place in the Christian life. These things are totally unbecoming to people heading for heaven. Filthy language, jokes about others, and making fun of people should have no place in our lives. Instead we should be grateful for what God and others have done for us.

5-7. You can be sure that no one who is greedy or immoral and who values things more than God can have a place in His kingdom. Don't let anyone fool you and tell you differently. It's because of disobedience that wicked people will reap the consequences of what they have done. Don't stay around those who insist on doing these things.

8-11. At one time you did some of these same wicked things, but now you're in the light. The light of Jesus produces in people everything that's good. Test your lives by those things. Don't get attached to people who try to get you to go back to what you did before. Show them, by your good example, that sin is wrong.

12-14. It's not even right to talk about the evil things these people do, much less do them yourselves. But the kind of life you live brings goodness to light. That's what the Scripture means when it says, "Wake up, those of you who are spiritually dead. Jesus will give you light."

15-17. So be careful how you live, and act wisely. Take advantage of every chance to do good, because there's so much evil in the world. Try to understand what God has in mind for you, and then do it.

18-20. Don't get drunk. If you're looking for excitement, get excited about

what God is doing. Sing and praise the Lord together, and you'll not only help yourself but also encourage others. Always thank God for what He has done for you through Jesus.

Husbands and Wives

21-24. Husbands and wives should respect each other. Be kind and be willing to give in to each other. Husbands should care for their wives and protect them, just as Jesus does the church. And just as the church lives to honor Jesus, so should wives honor their husbands.

25-27. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave His life for her. He did this to save us, even before we were baptized. He wants to have a glorious church, without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing. He wants the church to be holy and without fault.

28. Husbands should love and value their wives as they value their own bodies. When a husband cares about his wife, he's caring about himself, too, because they're one.

29-30. Everyone cares about his own body and wants to be healthy. Jesus wants to have a healthy church, because that's His body. Since we make up the church, we should also care about each other.

31-33. A husband should leave his parents and be one with his wife. He should love her as part of himself, which she is. That's what it means for two people to be one. This is a mystery, but that's the same with Jesus and His church. Husbands and wives should love each other, as Jesus loves His church.

Children and Parents

6 Children, obey your parents unless they tell you to disobey God. But always respect them whether

they love the Lord or not, because that's the right thing to do. The fifth commandment has a promise connected with it. It says that God will bless you and give you a long life if you do that.

4. Fathers, don't make your children angry by the way you treat them. Love them and bring them up with discipline approved by the Lord.

Servants and Masters

5-8. Servants, respect your masters and do what they tell you, as if you were working for Christ. Don't do your work only when someone's watching. Work to please God, not people. And do your work cheerfully, because you really are working for the Lord. He will reward everyone for their good influence, whether they're slave or free.

9. Masters, do the same for your servants. Be kind and reasonable. Don't forget that you too have a Master. The Lord makes no distinctions, but treats everyone the same.

The Armor of God

10-12. Finally, be strong in the Lord and stand in His power. Put on every piece of spiritual armor that He has given us. This will help you to stand against the devil. As you know, we're fighting, not an enemy that we can see, but spiritual beings who were once in heaven and are now trying to rule this world.

13. That's why you need to put on God's armor and to take a stand. Don't give an inch of ground, so that you'll still be standing when the fighting stops.

14-17. So take a stand! Put on the belt of truth. Wear the breastplate of Christ's righteousness. Put on the shoes of the gospel of peace. Take the shield of faith, which will stop the flaming arrows that Satan shoots at

you. Put on the helmet of salvation and take the sword of the Holy Spirit, which is the word of God.

18. Pray earnestly for the power of the Holy Spirit, because your life depends on it. Take care of the needs of your brothers and sisters in the church, and pray for them too.

19-20. Last of all, pray that God will give me the right words when I stand before the emperor. Pray that the Lord will help me to boldly share the gospel with him and other members of the court. I'm sitting here in chains because of my

witness. Pray that I'll defend the gospel no matter what happens.

Greetings

21-22. I want you to know that I sent Tychicus to tell you about the conditions I face here. He'll tell you not only how I'm doing, but also what God has done through our ministry.

23-24. Peace to all of you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. May His grace be with you and with all those who love Jesus sincerely. Amen.

Philippians

INTRODUCTION: *This letter was written by Paul to the believers in Philippi. He wrote it about A.D. 63 while still a prisoner in Rome. He thanked them for supporting his ministry, and he was filled with joy when he thought back on how helpful they had been in spreading the gospel. Paul was confident that God would continue to be with them. He reminded them of the kind of person Jesus was, and urged them to keep moving toward the goal of being like Him.*

Greetings

1 Greetings from Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus. This letter is to the church members in Philippi, including the elders and deacons. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

Paul Is Thankful

3-5. I thank my God every time I think of you. When I pray for you, it's with a happy heart. I thank God for the help you gave me in the work of the gospel from the first day you believed until now.

6. I'm sure that God, who started the good work in your hearts, will continue to do so until Jesus comes back to take you home.

7-8. It's right for me to feel this way about you, because you're close to my heart. I'll never forget how eager you were to help me preach the gospel, not only when I was with you, but now while I'm in prison. God knows how much I long to be free so that I can be with you again.

9-10. I pray that your love for each other will grow stronger and that you will have more spiritual understanding as the days go by. This kind of love will help you judge between good and evil. It will help you live pure,

blameless lives until you meet Jesus.

11. I want you to be full of goodness so that you will do many good things with the help of Jesus. These good works will bring praise and glory to God.

Paul Rejoices

12-13. My brothers and sisters, I want you to know that what has happened to me has actually helped spread the gospel. My imprisonment brought it right into Caesar's palace. All the guards know that I'm a believer in Jesus, and so does everyone else.

14. Many brothers in the faith have become more confident because of my imprisonment. They trust the Lord and preach the gospel boldly and without fear more than before.

15-16. But some are preaching out of rivalry to show who can win the most souls to Christ. Others like to debate or argue with people. But some preach the gospel out of love. They want to see people saved in the kingdom. They know the Lord sent me here to defend the gospel.

17-18. Those who preach Christ to promote their own ideas are trying to make trouble for me while I'm in chains. But I'm happy. At least Christ is being preached. That's what really matters.

Confidence in Christ

19-21. Because of your prayers and the working of the Holy Spirit I hope to be released from prison. But whatever happens, I will not be ashamed of Jesus. I will speak of Him with boldness. Whether I'm released or given the death sentence, it will all be for the glory of God.

22-24. If I had a choice, I would go right back to work for the Lord. But I don't have that choice. So I have mixed feelings. On the one hand, it's easier to die, because when I wake up I'll see Jesus. That's better than being in this old world. On the other hand, it's more important to stay and help you.

25-26. From what I've heard, it sounds as though I'll be released. Then I'll come to help you grow in Jesus and rejoice in the faith even more. And we'll have even greater reason to praise the Lord than just my release.

27. So no matter what happens, continue to live like men and women who have been changed by the gospel. Whether I'm released or waiting to be executed, I want to hear that you're united in your desire to be loyal to Jesus.

28. Don't be intimidated by those who don't like you. What they're trying to do to you is a sign of their own destruction. But your firmness and loyalty to Jesus is a sign from the God of your salvation.

29-30. God gave you the chance not only to accept Jesus, but now to show your loyalty by suffering for Him. You're going through the same struggles that I've been going through for years.

Be Like Jesus

2 Does knowing that Jesus loves you give you courage? Do you enjoy meeting with church mem-

bers? Are you kind to them? If so, make me even happier by showing more love to each other. And become still more united in the truth.

3-4. Don't let selfishness or pride be your motive for serving Jesus. Be humble and honor others above yourselves. Don't just think about your own life, but take an interest in others and what you can do to help them.

Christ's Greatness

5-7. Think and act like Jesus. Even though He was equal with God, He never bragged about it. When He came here, He acted the part of a servant.

8-9. And as a man, He obeyed God and honored Him, even when God asked Him to go to the cross and die for us. That's why God can exalt Him—because Jesus is so obedient and unselfish. Also, that's why God can rightfully give Him a name that is above every other name.

10-11. The time is coming when everyone in heaven and on earth will bow at Jesus' feet. They will confess that Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Lights in a Dark World

12-13. My dear friends, continue to love and obey God, as you did when I was with you. Now it's even more important. Work to put the gospel into action, and obey God with reverence and respect. It is God who is working in you, giving you the desire to please Him and the power to do it.

14-15. So whatever you do for Him, do it without complaining or arguing. Everything you do should be blameless and harmless. You are God's children living in a world of crooked people. You're like stars lighting up the night sky.

16. Hold fast to the gospel message. If

I don't see you again, I will when Jesus comes. I'll be so happy to know that my work for you was not in vain.

17-18. Maybe I'll have to die. If so, I want to add it to your sacrifice for Him. I'll be just as glad to die for Him as to live for Him. So if I'm put to death, don't be sad.

Timothy

19-20. I hope to send Timothy to see you. He'll tell you all about me and bring back good news about you. I don't have anyone else like him. He really cares about you.

21-22. So many people are interested in their own lives and not in the cause of Christ. But Timothy has proved himself to be like a son to me. We've worked and sacrificed for the Lord together.

23-24. I'll send him as soon as I know how things will turn out for me here. I'm still hoping to be released. If it's the Lord's will, I'll come to see you.

25-26. I'm planning to send Epaphroditus back to you. He's been a friend and fellow soldier, and has ministered to me in my need. Now he wants to go home to see you. He knows you're worried about him.

27-28. Yes, he was terribly sick, and almost died. But God had mercy on us and healed him. If he had died, it would have been a great loss to us on top of everything else. Now I'm happy for him to go home so that you can stop worrying.

29-30. When he gets there, give him a big welcome. He deserves it. After all, he risked his life for Jesus and almost died. He did for me what you weren't able to do.

Rejoice in the Lord

3 Finally, my brothers and sisters, be happy in the Lord. I don't mind repeating what I said, be-

cause it's good to hear it again. It will help you to rejoice even more.

2-3. Watch out for those who keep telling you that you have to observe Jewish rituals before you can be a real Christian. Such people are as irritating as barking dogs. We depend on Jesus, not on rituals to save us. Our confidence is not in what we can do, but in what He has done for us.

4-5. If anyone could place his faith in being a good Jew, I certainly could have. After all, I was born Jewish from the tribe of Benjamin. I was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. I was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish national council.

6-7. Was I sincere? Was I ever! The council even trusted me to get rid of the Christians. Ritual laws were very important to me. I thought they would make me right with God. But now my hope is not in myself, but in what Jesus has done for me.

8-9. All the honors I received are worthless compared to knowing Jesus, my Savior and Lord. Whatever I had before is rubbish compared to having Him in my heart. I have been made right with God by what Christ did for me. My new standing with God was a gift, which I accepted by faith. I did not earn it by keeping the law.

10-11. Now all I want is to know Jesus better each day and experience more of His power in my life. I want to be more like Him. I know I have to be willing to suffer for Him, as He willingly did for me. Yes, I'm willing to die for Him, because I have the hope of being resurrected, as He was.

12. I haven't yet reached the goal that I would like to, but every day I copy Him the best I can. Every day my fellowship with Him deepens. And I keep trying to be what Jesus had in mind for me when He first took hold of me.

13-14. I certainly don't consider myself to be perfect. But there is one thing I do. I forget the past and press toward the goal to win the prize that God has waiting for me.

15-17. Those of us who are spiritually mature should think this way too. If there are things you don't agree with, God will help you understand. In the meantime, let's keep our eyes on Jesus and hold on to the truth that we know. Follow my example or that of others who are close to Jesus.

Paul's Warning

18-19. I'm sorry to say that there are many who live as if they're enemies of Jesus. I've warned you about them before. And now with tears in my eyes I warn you again. These people have no future. Their god is their stomach, and they brag about things they should be ashamed of. All they think about is this life.

20-21. But our interest is in heaven. That's where our citizenship is. We look forward to the time when Jesus will come back. He will then change our weak, sinful bodies to be like His glorious body, using the power He has to rule over all things.

Paul's Love for the People

4 Dear brothers and sisters, I want you to know how much I love you and miss you. You are my joy and crown. I urge you to keep following the Lord.

2-3. I hear that two women in the church can't agree on things. Someone needs to help them, because both of them love the Lord. When I was there, they both worked very hard for Him. They helped me spread the gospel just as much as my other workers did. There's no doubt in my mind that their names are written in God's book of life.

4-5. Always rejoice in the Lord. Again I say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness and kindness be seen by all. Remember that through the Holy Spirit the Lord is always near you.

6-7. Don't worry so much about everything. Instead, ask God for what you need. Don't be afraid to ask, and thank Him for all that He has done. And the peace of God will keep you close to Jesus even though we don't understand how it all works.

8-9. Finally, my brothers and sisters, fill your minds with what is true, honorable, and right. Think about what is pure, lovely, and respectable. Talk about the good things others do. If there's any reason to praise God or people, do it. Put into practice what I've taught you and what you've learned from watching me. And the God of peace will be with you.

Paul's Appreciation

10-11. I was so happy in the Lord to hear that you still love and care about me. I'm not saying that you didn't care for me before, but you never had a chance to show it as much as now. Not that I need anything personally. Over the years I've learned to be content with what I have.

12-13. I know from experience what it's like to be in need and also to have more than enough. But whether I have much or little, whether hungry or well fed, I've learned to be happy. Jesus always gives the strength to do whatever He asks.

14-16. But I do appreciate what you have done for me. You know that in the early days of my ministry you were the only church that offered to help me. And you did that more than once.

17. I'm not telling you this because I want you to help me more than you have. I just want you to enjoy

the blessing that comes from being generous.

18-20. By the way, I did receive what you sent. It was more than enough. Thank you. Your generosity is like perfume, like a beautiful offering to God from hearts of love. My God will supply all your needs from His glorious resources through Christ Jesus. To our loving Father be glory and

honor now and forever. Amen.

Greetings

21-23. Greet everyone for me. Those who are here send their greetings. All the members in Rome send their greetings too, especially those who work in Caesar's palace. May the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Colossians

INTRODUCTION: *Paul wrote this letter from prison also. He wrote it for the Colossian believers about A.D. 62. Paul reminded them that Jesus is supreme. He created the whole universe and keeps holding it together. Jesus is the head of the church, and what He says is more important than anything else. From this book we learn that we should not mix our faith with what's popular in the world.*

Paul Rejoices

1 This letter is from Paul, who has been given a special work to do for God, and from my helper Timothy. We send our greetings to you faithful followers of Jesus. Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

3-5. You are always in our prayers, and we thank the Father of the Lord Jesus for you. We're especially thankful for your faith in Jesus and your love for God's people. And you have hope in your hearts, which is like a treasure in heaven. You learned about this hope from the gospel.

6-8. Since then the gospel has spread throughout the Roman world and is bearing fruit, just as it did among you. Epaphras, a fellow worker and member of your church, has faithfully ministered to you in our place. He told us about your love for one another and what the Holy Spirit is doing for you.

9-10. When we heard this, we thanked God. We continue to pray that He will help you grow in your understanding of spiritual things. Then you'll live fruitful lives pleasing to Him and will get to know Him even better.

11-12. May God help you to patiently meet troubles with His power. Let's continue to be happy in the Lord and

thank our heavenly Father, who made it possible for us to be citizens of heaven.

13-14. He rescued us from the power of darkness and fit us for the kingdom of His dear Son. It is through Jesus that we have been forgiven.

The Importance of Jesus

15-17. Jesus is just like God and has the rights of a firstborn over all creation. He made everything in heaven and on earth, things you can see and things you can't see. So Jesus is above all rulers, governments, and kings. Everything continues because He's the one who holds it all together.

18-19. Jesus is the head of the church and controls it as the head does the body. Even though He existed from the beginning, He became like us. As such, He was the only person who ever died and conquered death. That's why He is worthy to be given first place in heaven and on earth. And the Father was pleased to do this.

20-21. Jesus brought peace to the human race by dying on the cross and uniting heaven and earth. He removed the hostility that was in your hearts toward God, shown by the way you acted. Now things have changed, and you're different.

22-23. Jesus died in your place so that He could present you faultless to the Father, free from all sin. You need to continue to put your faith in Him. Determine not to leave Him. Hold on to the hope in the gospel. The good news about Jesus has been told throughout the Roman world. And I, Paul, am helping to preach it.

The Good News

24-25. I'm happy in what I have suffered for the church. Even Jesus continues to suffer through His body, the church, as it suffers. As a minister, I share this suffering with Him. I have been called to serve the church by preaching the gospel.

26. The teaching of God's good news has not changed from the beginning of time. But now it is better understood by God's people.

27. God wants all people to learn of this wonderful truth. He would like you to share it by letting others see Jesus in you. He is our assurance of someday sharing His glory.

28-29. So everywhere we go, we preach Jesus. We want to present everyone to God mature in Christ. So I work hard, using all my energies for Him. Jesus is the one who strengthens me and keeps me going.

Not Just Ideas but Jesus

2 I want you to know how much I've prayed for you, for the members in Laodicea, and for those I haven't even met. May the Lord comfort you as you draw together in love to meet the evil around you. I want you to understand the truth about Jesus and experience the same closeness that exists between the Father and the Son.

3-5. In Jesus is all the wisdom of heaven. I'm telling you this so that

you won't be deceived by clever arguments. Even though I'm not there, my heart is with you. I'm happy for your good lives and strong faith in Jesus.

6-7. Just as you accepted Jesus with joyful hearts as your Savior and Lord, continue to walk with Him the same way. Root yourself in Him; build your lives around Him; strengthen your faith in Him—all with gladness and thanksgiving.

8. Be on guard against arguments that undermine the gospel. Such arguments are based not on truth, but on human tradition. That's the way the world thinks.

9-10. The fullness of God was in Jesus. He is the only man in whom is all the wisdom and knowledge of God. It is in Him that you are complete. He is over all spiritual powers and human authority.

Not Just Religion but Jesus

11-12. When you gave your hearts to Jesus, they were cut open, not physically but spiritually, and the power of sin was taken away. That's what your baptism was all about. You were buried in the water and then rose again. Because of your faith in Jesus, the same power that raised Him from the dead changed your hearts.

13-14. When you were spiritually dead, your life was sinful. But God gave you a new heart and a new life in Christ. He has forgiven your sins. He has paid what we owed Him for breaking the rules He gave us. He canceled all these charges by nailing them to the cross.

15. It was on Calvary that Jesus took evil captive and stripped it of its power. He let the whole universe see this victory.

16-17. Don't let anyone tell you that you have to go through certain rituals, eat certain foods, keep certain feasts, or observe extra sabbaths to be saved.

All these things pointed forward to Jesus. So now they're meaningless.

18. Don't let anyone trick you by acting humble and telling you that you should worship angels because they had visions about it. Such people are full of themselves.

19. You can tell that they're not connected to Jesus, who is the head of the church. The whole church body depends on Christ. He's the one who holds it together, as muscles and joints do a body. And God strengthens the church and makes it grow.

20. When you accepted Jesus and died to sin, your religious pride should have died too. Don't go back to religious rituals to make yourself right with God.

21-22. Jewish rituals that say "Don't do this," "Don't taste that," and "Don't touch that" are worthless. These rules were made by men and don't mean a thing. They will not make you right with God.

23. These rules might seem right because they require humility, devotion, and self-discipline. But they don't earn you honor points with God, and are totally useless when it comes to controlling your evil thoughts and desires.

A New Life in Jesus

3 Since you've been spiritually raised to a new life in Jesus, keep your eyes on Him. He's sitting to the right of God, which is a place of great honor. Set your hearts on things in heaven, not on things on earth.

3-4. Remember that your old sinful self is dead and that you have a new life with Jesus. When Jesus comes back, you'll have a share in His glory.

5-6. So get rid of any sinful desires and habits you might still have, such as impurity, evil passions, greed, and selfishness. One day God will with-

draw the Holy Spirit from the earth, and those who still do these things will have to face the consequences.

7-9. You did these things before, but you've changed. You're no longer angry, going around hurting others, gossiping, using bad language, or telling lies. But be careful not to slip back into your old ways.

10-11. You're a new people now. Every day God is making you more and more like Jesus. There's no difference between Greeks and Jews, rich and poor, free people and slaves, because Jesus died for all of us.

12-14. God has set you apart as His very own. He loves you. So be merciful, kind, humble, gentle, and patient. Don't be angry with each other. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. But above all else, love one another, because love will hold you together.

15. Let the peace of God fill your hearts and minds. God wants you to work together in harmony, just as all the parts of our bodies do. Thank God for the fellowship you have with each other.

16-17. May the message of Jesus fill your hearts and enrich your lives. Encourage each other with scriptures and the singing of hymns as your hearts overflow in gratitude to Him. Everything you do, in word and action, do in the name of Jesus. Thank God for the gift of His Son.

A Word About Family

18-21. Now let me say something about families. Wives, honor your husbands, because God wants you to. Husbands, love your wives and be kind to them. Children, obey your parents, for this makes God happy. Parents, don't treat your children harshly, or they'll become discouraged.

Employees

22-25. Servants, listen to your employers and do what they ask. Remember that you're working not just for people but for the Lord. When Jesus comes back, He'll reward you for it. Those who do evil will be punished for what they did. God doesn't play favorites, but judges everyone fairly.

Employers

4 Employers, treat those who are working for you fairly and do what's right for them. Remember that you too have an Employer in heaven.

Prayer

2-4. Keep on praying, and stay spiritually alert. Be grateful for what Jesus has done for you. And pray that God will give us opportunities to tell people the good news about Jesus. That's why I was arrested and put in prison. Pray that I will give this message clearly so that people can understand it.

5-6. Be tactful as you share your faith, and do so whenever you can. Always be pleasant and courteous. Know what you believe, so that you can answer when people ask questions.

Greetings

7-8. Tychicus is a fellow worker whom we all love. The reason I'm sending him to you is to tell you how we are doing and to encourage you.

9. Onesimus, our faithful brother who is one of your members, will be com-

ing with him. Together they'll tell you everything that's happened here.

10-11. Aristarchus, who is in prison with me, sends his greetings. So does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. I've already told you to welcome Mark if he comes. Justus also sends his greetings. These are the only Jewish Christians working with me for the kingdom of God. They've been a great help and a real comfort.

12. Epaphras, one of your other members and a true follower of Jesus, also sends his greetings. Every day he prays that God will help you stand firm for Jesus and continue to be totally committed to doing His will.

13-14. I should tell you that he has worked just as hard for believers in Laodicea and other places as he did for you. Luke, our dear friend and doctor, and Demas also send their greetings.

15. Give my greetings to the brothers from Laodicea when you see them. Also greet Nymphas and the believers who meet in her house.

The Church at Laodicea

16. After you've read this letter to your members, send it to the church in Laodicea so that they can read it to their members. And when you get the letter I sent to them, read it in your church.

17. By the way, tell Archippus to take his call to the ministry seriously and do the work the Lord wants him to do.

18. Now let me write this last sentence myself. Greetings from me, your brother Paul. Don't forget that I'm chained here in prison. May God's grace be with you. Amen.

1 Thessalonians

INTRODUCTION: *This letter was written by Paul while visiting Corinth about A.D. 51. It was for the believers in the city of Thessalonica. Paul was happy to hear about their faith and hope in Jesus. He encouraged them to continue to live that way in spite of the problems they were having. Then Paul reminded them that Jesus will come again, just as He promised.*

Greetings

1 Greetings from Paul, Silas, and Timothy. To the church members in the city of Thessalonica who belong to God and Jesus. May God's grace and peace be yours.

Paul Thanks God

2-3. We thank God for all of you and keep you in our prayers. We can't forget how quickly you put your faith into practice. We remember how much you loved Jesus and how happy you were to serve Him. You placed your faith and hope in Him.

4-5. Brothers and sisters, God loves you. He has chosen you for something special. We know this because when we brought the gospel to you, the power of the Holy Spirit convicted you that our words were true. And you saw the way we lived.

6. You followed our example and became followers of Jesus, in spite of great suffering. The inward joy you received came from the Holy Spirit.

7-8. So now you are being examples to other believers all through Macedonia and Greece. Not only did you take the gospel there, but news of your strong faith has spread everywhere. We don't need to tell others about your faith in God; they already know.

9-10. Wherever we go, people talk about how quickly you accepted the gospel and turned away from idols. They also know how eagerly you're looking forward to the coming of Jesus, whom God raised from the dead. He is the one who delivered us from the coming judgment.

Paul's Work

2 Brothers and sisters, you can see that our visit to you was not a failure. Before we came we had been shamefully treated and imprisoned in Philippi. When we came to you, many people were against us. But we preached the good news of the gospel with God-given courage.

3-4. We didn't teach false doctrines or have some evil plan, or tell you lies. We simply shared the gospel with you as God told us to. We were not preaching to please people but to please Him. God sees what we're doing and reads our motives.

5. Our sermons didn't flatter anyone, nor did we preach the gospel to get rich. God knows that. We didn't try to get what we could and then leave town. Our motive was to help you.

6-8. Our preaching wasn't to gain praise or financial support. We didn't ask you to help us. We tried to be as

gentle as a mother caring for her baby. Because you were very dear to us, we were happy to share the gospel and even to risk our lives for you.

9-10. You remember how hard we worked to support ourselves, sometimes working late into the night. We didn't want to be a financial burden while preaching God's good news to you. You know, and so does God, that we lived a good Christian life.

11-12. We treated you the way a loving father treats his children. We comforted you and encouraged you to live lives pleasing to God. He wants to share His kingdom and glory with you.

13. We always thank God that when we brought the gospel to you, you listened. You received it as coming, not from us, but from God. This told us that God had already been working on your hearts.

Persecutions

14. What is happening to you now is also happening to believers in Judea. You're receiving the same harsh treatment from your countrymen as they are from the Jews.

15. It was this attitude that led men to reject Jesus and then kill Him. Their ancestors did the same thing to God's prophets. Now they're persecuting you and us. How can they think that they're pleasing God?

16. Everywhere we go they try to stop us from preaching the good news. But they're only adding sin to sin. Someday they'll reap the consequences of what they're doing.

Paul's Plan

17-18. When we were forced out of your city, we were separated from you, but not in our hearts. We want to see you again. We're doing all we can to work things out, but each time

Satan has stirred things up to keep us from coming back.

19-20. What is life without faith, hope, and victory in Jesus? When He returns and we all stand in His presence, what a joy it will be to see you there! You are our glory and joy.

Paul's Concern

3 When we were in Athens, we couldn't wait to hear what was happening to you. When Timothy came and told us about your sufferings, we sent him back. He's been helping us spread the gospel. Now he needs to be with you to comfort and encourage you to be faithful.

3-4. Don't turn away from Jesus because of what you're going through. God knows all about these persecutions. When we were with you we kept telling you that you might be persecuted for your faith. And now it's happened.

5. The reason I sent Timothy the first time was that I just had to know if your faith was holding up. I was worried that the persecutions Satan stirred up might be too much for you. Then all our work and sacrifice for you would have been wasted.

Good News

6. Timothy is now back and has told us the good news about your strong faith and love for the Lord. He also told us about your love for us and that you want to see us as much as we want to see you.

7-9. My brothers and sisters, your faith in the Lord gives us courage to face the problems we have here. Now that we know that you're standing firm for Jesus, we can go about our work with greater confidence. How can we thank God enough for the joy you bring to our ministry!

Paul's Prayer

10-11. Night and day we pray that God will help us come to see you. Then we'll be able to strengthen your faith still more. May our heavenly Father make this possible.

12-13. In the meantime, may the Lord make your love grow strong for each other. May He give you strength to live for Him and to be blameless and holy in His presence with all of God's people when Jesus comes.

Live to Honor God

4 Brothers and sisters, I urge you for Jesus' sake that you put into practice what we have taught you. Live more and more for the glory of God. What we taught you was given on the authority of Jesus.

3-6. God wants you to be holy and stay away from temptation. Don't do the bad things others do. Take charge of your lives and do what is pure and good. Don't be like those who don't know God. Don't lie, cheat, and take advantage of others. We told you before that the Lord will punish those who do those things.

7-8. God has called us to live lives of purity and goodness. Those who don't do what we taught are disobeying not us, but God. He is the one who, through the Holy Spirit, told us what to tell you.

Be Good Citizens

9-10. I don't have to write to you about loving one another. The Holy Spirit has already taught you that. And your attitude toward believers in Macedonia shows it. But we would like you to love each other still more.

11-12. Try to live peaceful and orderly lives. Work to earn an honest living, minding your own business. This way people will see you as good citizens.

You'll be able to take care of yourselves without depending on others.

Good People Will Live Again

13-14. We want to be sure you know the truth about your loved ones who have died. They are sleeping in Jesus. So don't cry like people who have no hope. Jesus died and lived again, and so will we when He comes.

15. We're telling you this because this is what Jesus said. He told us that those who are alive when He comes will not be taken to heaven before those who have died.

16-18. When Jesus comes, He'll come with all His angels. He'll give a shout like a trumpet, and those who died believing in Him will be resurrected. Then those who are alive and belong to Him will be changed, and together we'll all be caught up to meet Jesus in the sky to be with Him forever. Comfort each other with these words.

Be Ready for Jesus' Coming

5 I don't have to write to you about the times and seasons that will show that the Lord is soon to come. You know from what I've told you that the Lord will come as a thief in the night.

3. When everyone says, "Let's have peace and make the world safe," then sudden destruction will come on the whole world. The end will come as quickly as birth pains come on a mother giving birth to a baby.

4-6. But God's people are not in the dark about this. So that day need not surprise you like a thief. We know it's coming. Let's not be so at ease, because of the light we have, that we're not ready if anything should happen to us. So stay awake!

7-8. Most people sleep at night. But some love to go out and get drunk.

We belong to the day and not the night. Stay awake and be sober. We must put on the armor of faith and show Jesus that we love Him. Our helmet is the hope of our salvation.

9-11. God planned not to destroy us but to save us. That's why Jesus came and died in our place. So whether we're dead or alive, when He comes, He will take us home to live with Him forever. So encourage each other in the faith, just as you've been doing.

A Final Word

12-13. Brothers and sisters, respect those who are working so hard for you. The Lord has given you leaders to help in your walk with Jesus. For the sake of the work, honor them and give them your wholehearted love. And be at peace among yourselves.

14-15. Fellow workers, warn those believers who are misbehaving. Encourage those who are ready to give up. Help those who are weak, and be patient with everyone. See to it that no one tries to get even with another. Be

kind and forgiving, both in and outside the church.

16-18. Brothers and sisters, be happy in the Lord. Never stop praying. Be thankful to God for what He has done for you, no matter what happens. This is what God expects from those who know Jesus.

19-22. Don't put out the spiritual fire the Holy Spirit has lit in your hearts. Don't treat the gift of prophecy as if it's not important. Test everything you read and hear. Hold on to what is true. And avoid any kind of evil, even if it seems innocent.

Greetings

23-24. May the God of peace be with you and help you live for Him. We pray that your whole being, your body, mind, and spirit, be kept blameless until Jesus comes. God is faithful, and He will help you as He promised.

25-28. Please pray for us. Greet all our members with a warm embrace. I'm asking that you read this letter in church for everyone to hear. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

2 Thessalonians

INTRODUCTION: *Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians about A.D. 52, while he was still in Corinth. He was proud of them and was telling other churches about them. He warned them not to be deceived about the time of Jesus' coming. There were some things that had to happen first. Paul told them to keep on working and believing, just as he was doing.*

Greetings

1 This letter is from Paul, Silas, and Timothy. It's to the church in Thessalonica, which belongs to God our heavenly Father and to our Savior, Jesus. Grace and peace to you from the Father and the Son.

The Coming of Jesus

3-4. Friends, we're thankful for all of you. Your faith in God and love for each other is growing stronger and stronger. We brag about you to other churches. We tell them about your endurance and faith in the Lord, in spite of suffering and troubles.

5-6. This shows what God's grace can do. It shows that His confidence in you has not been misplaced. It shows that you're citizens of His kingdom, because you're willing to suffer and die for it. God will repay those who are persecuting you. They won't get away with what they're doing.

7-9. Stay focused on Jesus. He'll give you the rest you deserve when He comes back to take you home. He'll come surrounded by all His angels and, with blazing fire, carry out judgment on those who refuse to know God or obey the gospel. They will be totally destroyed by the glory of the Lord and His mighty power.

10. When Jesus comes back, His love will be reflected in His people, for they are living miracles of His grace. They will be amazed at the glory of Jesus, in whom they have put their faith. You will be among them, because you have believed what we've told you.

11-12. We keep praying that God will help you live for Him as I know you want to. Then Jesus will be seen still more in your lives, and by His grace His name will be glorified.

The Great Deception

2 Let me make it clear about the time of Jesus' return and when we will meet Him, so there won't be any confusion.

2. Don't be misled if people say that the time for Jesus to come is already here. Don't listen to them, even if they say they have the gift of prophecy or a letter from me, for it's not true.

3-4. Don't let anyone fool you. Jesus will not come until the final deception takes place and the one behind it all is revealed. He will exalt himself and oppose all those who worship God and hold to the truth. He will set himself up in the church as if he were God, and even claim that he's speaking for God.

5-7. Remember, I told you these things when I was with you. God is holding back the full power of this man until the end-time. This mysterious power is already working. It will continue to spread until God exposes the one behind it.

8-9. Then this man will be seen for what he really is—one who has been against God's law all along. Jesus will destroy him by the power of His word and by the brightness of His coming. Just before that, Satan will do all he can to help this man with signs and false miracles.

10-12. Those who don't love the truth that would have saved them will be deceived by the devil. So God will let them believe the lies they love to hear. They will be punished, not because they believed those lies, but because they didn't believe the truth and loved their way of life more.

Stand Firm

13-14. We thank God for you. The Lord loves you. You are some of the first ones in your country to accept the gospel. You were drawn to the Lord by the Holy Spirit as soon as you heard about Jesus. But God has not only spoken to your hearts; He has also called you to share in the glory of His Son.

15-17. So stand firm and hold on to what we taught you in our letters and when we were there. May Jesus Himself and God our Father, who loves us and has given us hope, continue to give you courage to stand firm in what we believe.

Pray for Us

3 Finally, pray for us that we will be able to spread the good news about Jesus freely. And pray that others will accept it as eagerly

as you did. Also pray that we'll be protected from those wicked men who hate the gospel.

3-5. But remember that the Lord is faithful. He will continue to strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. We know that you will be faithful to Him and do what He asks you to do. We pray that He will help you know more and more of His love. May He give you the same faith that Jesus had.

Don't Be Lazy

6-7. Dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of Jesus our Lord, we insist that you stay away from believers who sit around doing nothing. This is not what we taught them. Did you ever see us just sitting around?

8-10. We worked day and night making tents to support ourselves. Then we were able to share the gospel with you without asking for money. We could have, but we wanted to leave you a good example. Remember what we said: "A person who refuses to work shouldn't eat."

11-12. I hear that some among you have stopped working. Instead, they're going around minding everyone else's business but their own. In the name of the Lord Jesus we insist that these people go to work and stop living off the church.

13-15. Dear friends, never get tired of doing good and helping others. But if anyone refuses to listen to what I've said, stop inviting him home to dinner. Maybe he'll wake up and be ashamed of living off the members. Now, don't go to extremes and treat him as an enemy. Talk to him as a brother and help him do what's right.

A Final Greeting

16. We pray that the Lord will give

you the peace of heaven. May He be
with you in everything you do.

17. I, Paul, am finishing this letter in my

own handwriting, as I do all my letters.

18. May the grace of the Lord Jesus
be with all of you. Amen

1 Timothy

INTRODUCTION: *This is a personal letter from Paul to Timothy. He wrote it about A.D. 65, after he had been released from prison and was doing missionary work again. Timothy was pastoring the church in the city of Ephesus. Paul told Timothy to preach the word, to watch out for false teachers, to choose good leaders, and to set an example. He also told him how to help different members with their problems.*

Greetings

1 This letter is from Paul, an apostle of Jesus. I was called to be an apostle by the God who saves us and by Jesus, who is our hope. I'm sending this to Timothy, my son in the faith. May the grace, mercy, and peace of God our Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, be with you.

False Teaching

3-4. Timothy, you need to stay in Ephesus to stop those who are teaching false doctrines. They teach things based on Jewish legends and priestly ancestry. This just raises a lot of questions about the gospel. Instead, they ought to encourage each other in the faith.

5. Tell the members that Jesus taught us to love each other. This love should come from pure hearts, a good conscience, and sincere faith.

6-7. Some have already turned away from the gospel because they kept picking apart what we had taught them. These people want to teach, not listen and learn. But they don't fully understand what they believe, even though they're so sure about it.

8-11. We know that the law of God is good if used the right way. It's not against good people. It's against

criminals, murderers, kidnappers, liars, and those who live impure lives. It's even against Christians who live contrary to God's commandments. Sound doctrine brings the law and the gospel together. That's what God told us to teach.

God's Grace

12-13. I thank Jesus for trusting me. He called me into the ministry and gave me strength to serve Him. He did this in spite of the times when I used to curse His name. I persecuted His people and even put them to death. But Jesus was merciful to me, because I didn't know what I was doing. I thought I was serving God.

14-15. God was kind to me. He filled me with the faith and love that I needed to help others. Believe me, it's true. Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I have been the worst of them.

16. But Jesus was patient with me and loved me. He wanted people to see what He could do with a terrible sinner like me. This way they too would be encouraged to accept Christ and be given eternal life.

17. So to the King of all ages, immortal, invisible, the only true God, to Him be honor and glory forever. Amen.

The Ministry

18. Timothy, you are like a son to me. What I'm telling you is based on a prophecy I received about you. May these instructions from God give you courage to continue to fight the good fight of faith.

19. Hold on to what you believe and keep a clear conscience. Some didn't listen to the Holy Spirit speaking through their conscience, but left and made shipwreck of their faith.

20. I'm thinking of Alexander and his friend. I had to leave them in the hands of Satan. They wouldn't listen to me anymore. I just hope and pray that they'll wake up and stop speaking against Jesus.

Pray Earnestly

2 I urge our people to pray more earnestly. They should tell God about their needs, with thankful hearts for what He has done for them. Pray that people will accept the gospel and be saved. Also pray for those in authority, that we may live in peace while being loyal to God. This is good because God wants everyone to hear the truth and be saved.

5-6. There is only one God and only one go-between between us and God, the man Christ Jesus. By His death on the cross He paid the price to free everyone from sin so all who want to can be saved. This shows how much God loves us, and it took place at the appointed time.

7. God has called me to preach this good news, and to take the gospel to other people besides my own. I'm telling you the truth.

Christian Behavior

8-9. I want all our men to pray wherever they are and stop being so angry and argumentative. And I want

our women to dress modestly and sensibly. They should not braid gold into their hair or wear pearls or other expensive clothes to draw attention to themselves.

10-12. Instead they should make themselves beautiful by doing good, as godly women do. And let them be humble learners instead of exercising authority over men, as pagan women do.

13-14. Remember that Adam was created first and then Eve. He was not tricked into sin, but she was, the first one to lose faith in what God said and to sin.

15. Yet it was through a woman that God's promised Seed came to save us. Yet women also must be saved by faith in Christ. They should live holy lives, love others, and serve the Lord.

Church Elders

3 When a man wants to be a leader and help the church, that's good. He should have only one wife. And he should show good judgment, be hospitable, and know how to teach the gospel.

3-5. He should not be someone who loves wine, who is always arguing, or who loves money. He should be gentle and peaceful, patient and kind. He should be a good husband and be able to help his own family respect and obey the Lord. If he can't do that, how is he going to help the church?

6-7. A recent convert should not be put into leadership too soon, or he might become proud. Then he would come under the same judgment that Lucifer did in heaven. He should be someone who is respected in the community, someone who would not be easily deceived by Satan and end up disgracing himself and the church.

Church Deacons

8-10. Deacons should have the same general qualifications as elders. They should be dignified and not trouble-makers. They should not be addicted to wine or controlled by a passion to get rich. They should be true to the teachings of the Bible. You should test them before you put them in office.

11. Women who serve as deaconesses should also have a good character. They should be known in the church or in the community, not as gossipers, but as sensible, responsible women, honest in everything they do.

12-13. Any man who serves the church in any way should be faithful to his wife and be able to guide his family and manage his finances. If those men carry out their duties as they should, they'll develop a good reputation. They'll be able to stand up and speak boldly about their faith.

Paul Calls for Timothy

14-15. As I'm writing this letter, I'm still hoping to come to see you. But if I'm delayed, this letter will help you to know how things should be done in the church. Our members need to know how to conduct themselves. They are to be pillars of truth in a world of sin.

16. Without question there's a mystery to our faith. Just think: the Son of God became a man. He was anointed by the Holy Spirit at His baptism. He died on the cross. He was resurrected. He was taken to heaven. He is worshiped by angels. He is preached about among the nations. People all over the world believe in Him.

The Last Days

4 The Holy Spirit has told us that in the last days people will give up the faith. Some will listen to

lies and end up believing doctrines of devils. Others will pretend to be loyal to the church while teaching things that are not true. They will have no conscience, as if it had been scorched by a hot iron.

3-5. Some will say that it's wrong to get married or that it's wrong to eat certain foods that God says are good. God created food and marriage in the Garden of Eden. We should be thankful for His guidance and praise Him for His goodness. He will bless us for it and answer our prayers.

Be an Example

6. Timothy, remind the people of these things. That's what a good minister should do. And you can do this, because you've strengthened your faith by the word of God and by following what we have taught you.

7. Don't waste time trying to explain Jewish legends that people ask about. Some really love to hang on to such things. Instead, use your energies in being a good disciple and sharing Jesus with others.

8-9. Take time for exercise. It will keep you physically fit and mentally alert. But most of all, exercise your spiritual faculties. This will give you not only a happier life here but also eternal life in God's kingdom. You've heard me say all this before, but it's still true.

10-11. We gladly work and suffer for Jesus because we have set our faith and hope on God's promises. He offers salvation to everyone, but He can save only those who believe and trust Him. I urge you to preach and teach these things.

12. Don't let anyone tell you that you're too young to do that. Just be an example to believers in speech, attitude, faith, and purity.

13. Until I'm released from prison and

get there, continue to base your sermons on the Bible. Read the Scriptures during worship to strengthen our people. And keep teaching what's right.

14-16. Don't neglect the spiritual gifts that God gave you when you were ordained. Think about your duties as a minister, and put your gifts to use so that everyone can see your own spiritual growth. Center your teaching and preaching on Jesus. As you do this, you'll be helping not only yourself but also those who listen to you.

Older Members

5 As you pastor the church in Ephesus, treat them as family. Speak kindly to an older man as if he were your father. Relate to the young men as if they were your brothers. Treat an older woman as if she were your mother. And respect the younger women as you would your sisters.

Widows

3-6. Widows who live alone should be treated with special kindness. If her children or grandchildren can take care of her, they should do so. This pleases God. A Christian widow who has no one prays to God for help. But if a widow turns away from the Lord and lives for pleasures, the church has no reason to help her.

7-8. Use these instructions as a guideline to help those who really need it, so that the church won't be criticized. Those who don't take care of their own family and relatives are not doing what our faith stands for. Such members are worse than unbelievers.

9-10. Take care of the older widows, who are known for the good they have done. They have raised children, were hospitable, helped those in need, and devoted themselves to

doing good. They will not likely be getting married again.

11-12. Don't put on your welfare list younger widows who can go out and work. Some of them want a family so badly that they have turned their backs on Jesus. They have broken the promise they made to be faithful to God.

13. So if the church supports them, they'll spend their time gossiping and talking about church members and other things they have no business talking about.

14-15. It's not wrong for a young widow to want to get married again. And we pray that she'll find a good husband, have a family, and manage a good Christian home. But some of these widows have already left the church.

16. Now, if members have a widow in their family, they should look after her. The church shouldn't do that. The church needs to take care of the widows who are alone and really need help.

Fairness

17-18. Church elders who do a good job are worthy of double honor, especially those who preach and teach. As the Scriptures say: "Don't stop feeding the ox while it's working for you" and "A working man should be paid for what he has done."

19-20. Don't listen to someone who talks against a church elder unless you hear it from two or three witnesses. And if he is sinning and people know it, the church should discipline him. If it's done right and with kindness, it may help him and keep others from doing the same things.

21-22. I charge you before God and His Son, Jesus Christ, that you carry out your pastoral responsibilities. Don't favor one person above another.

Be fair. Don't be partial. Don't ordain people and put them into office too soon. Don't get involved in church politics and end up doing something wrong. Stay spiritually clean.

23. Take care of your digestive problems, which have been made worse by the stress you're under. Don't drink polluted water, but buy yourself some unfermented wine.

24. As a pastor, you can tell when some people are living in sin, because everybody seems to know it. But for some you can't really tell and shouldn't go around trying to find out. What they're doing will come up in the judgment anyway.

25. It's the same with good deeds. You can easily tell the good people by what they do and say. Many good deeds won't be known until the judgment. But no deeds, good or bad, will go unnoticed.

Masters and Servants

6 Church members who are slaves of pagan masters should respect them. This is so that their masters won't curse God and blame our faith for not teaching respect. Those who own slaves should treat them as brothers and sisters. These are the things you ought to preach and teach.

Greed

3-4. If someone in the church teaches something different, he doesn't really believe what Jesus taught, no matter what he says. He doesn't know what he's talking about, and loves to argue about the meaning of words. This causes all kinds of trouble.

5-7. Some think that by doing this, they're serving God. They get people to support them, and see it as a way of getting rich. It's true that serving God makes us rich, by being satisfied with

what we have. When we came into this world we came with nothing, and when we leave we'll leave with nothing.

8-9. If we have food, clothes, and shelter, let's be content. Those who think only about getting rich set themselves up for all kinds of temptations. If they're not careful, they'll be caught in the undertow of sin and be pulled into the deep like a sinking ship.

10. Loving money leads to all kinds of evil. Some are so eager to get rich that they leave the church. They have lots of heartaches.

Faith

11. But, Timothy, you're a Christian. Stay away from all these things. Do what's right. Live a godly life with faith, love, patience, and gentleness. Be like Jesus.

12. Fight the battle of faith. Keep a grip on eternal life, which you received from God when you accepted Jesus as your Savior. You made a public confession of your faith when you were baptized.

13-15. I charge you, Timothy, in the sight of God, who gives us life, and of Jesus, who confessed His faith before Pilate, that you do what you were commanded to do. Keep your ministry clean until Jesus comes back, so no one can find fault with you. In His own time He'll come back as King of kings and Lord of lords.

16. God is the only one who has immortality and never dies. He lives in a light so bright that no sinful man has ever seen His face and lived. To Him be honor, power, and glory forever. Amen.

Riches

17. Talk to those of our members who are rich. Tell them to be careful not to become proud and trust in their wealth. They should put their trust in

trust in God, who gave them what they have to enjoy.

18-19. Teach them to do good. They can be rich in good deeds by helping others and by being generous and ready to share. It's like putting money into the bank of heaven. They will enjoy life here and be given eternal life later.

A Final Word

20-21. Timothy, my son, hold on to the truth that God has given you. Keep out of foolish arguments. Stay away from those who claim to have some higher "knowledge" that is against the gospel. Some of these people have already left the faith. May God's grace be with you.

2 Timothy

INTRODUCTION: *This letter was written by Paul about A.D. 67, after he was put into prison in Rome a second time. He encouraged Timothy to be a good soldier, to keep the faith, and to teach God's truth faithfully. Then he urged Timothy to bring him his coat and scrolls. He was lonely and cold and missed having a copy of God's word. This was Paul's last imprisonment before he was killed for his faith.*

Thankful

1 From Paul, a missionary of Jesus, who was sent by God to offer people eternal life through Jesus. To Timothy, my dear son in the faith. May grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

3-4. I'm thankful for what God has done for me, and I seek Him sincerely as some of my ancestors did. Day and night I pray for you. How I wish I could see you! I still remember your tears when they arrested me a second time. It would give me courage and joy to see you again.

5. I think of your unwavering faith, the same kind I saw in your mother, Lois, and in your grandmother Eunice. There is no doubt that you will remain loyal to Jesus too.

6. Remember to keep that inner fire burning. God put it in your heart when He called you to the ministry and I laid my hands on you in ordination.

7-8. God gave us a spirit, not of fear, but of love, self-discipline, and boldness for Him. So don't be ashamed of the gospel or of me because I'm in prison. We need to be willing to suffer for the gospel. And God will give us the strength we need.

9. God sent His Son to save us, and

called us to be His people. This wasn't because of anything good we had done. He purposed to do this for us through Jesus even before our world began.

10-11. What God had in mind for us was made clear when Jesus came. He destroyed the power of death. And He helped people learn about the gift of eternal life that He wants them to have. This is the good news that God told me to take to people everywhere.

12. I've suffered a lot for this. But I'm not ashamed to be here. I know Jesus, and I believe in Him. I know that He is able to keep my heart, which I have committed to Him. He'll keep it safe until the day that I see Him face to face.

13-14. Remember to live up to the truths that I have taught you. Follow them because of your love for Jesus and your faith in Him. The Holy Spirit who is in your heart will help protect the truths you have been given.

15. As you know, the men who came to Rome with me have now left me.

16-18. May the Lord bless Onesiphorus' family. He looked all over Rome until he found me. When he did, he visited and encouraged me. He wasn't ashamed of my chains. You remember all he did for me in

Ephesus. Surely the Lord will bless him on that day when Jesus comes to take us home.

Be a Good Soldier

2 Timothy, my son, be strong in God's saving grace, which comes to us through Christ Jesus. I want you pass on what I've taught you to people you can trust. Then they can teach it to others.

3-6. Accept your share of suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. A soldier on duty doesn't get involved in other things. His one aim is to please his commander by carrying out orders. And an athlete doesn't receive a gold medal unless he follows the rules. The farmer who has worked hard should get a reward from the harvest.

7. Think about these examples. The Lord will help you understand the principles involved and how to apply them to your ministry and to the people.

8-9. Don't forget that as a man, Jesus was a descendant of David. But He was raised from the dead and is now in the presence of God. This is the good news I've been preaching all along. It was because of this that I've been arrested, chained, and lowered into this dungeon like a dangerous criminal. But God's Word isn't chained.

10. I'm willing to suffer anything for my own people, if it helps them accept Jesus as the Messiah and be saved. And I pray that our church members, who have given their hearts to Jesus, will continue to be God's people by having faith in Him.

11-12. If we turn away from sin, as Jesus did, then we'll be raised from the dead, as He was. If we suffer and sacrifice for Him as He did for us, then we'll share in His glory. If we deny knowing Him, then He'll have no choice but to deny knowing us.

13-14. If we turn away from Jesus, He'll still love us, because that's how He is. Remind our people of these things. Tell them to stop arguing about the meaning of words. It's useless and wears out those who listen to it.

Live to Please God

15. Every day, think about what you can do to please God. Show Him that you're a workman He doesn't need to be ashamed of. You are dividing the word of truth correctly, and sharing the gospel with tact and conviction.

16-18. Stay away from senseless discussions. Such talk leads people away from God and spreads like cancer. I know two men who are like that. They have left the truth and are telling people that there is no resurrection—that it already took place in our hearts when we were born again. This has undermined the faith of some in the gospel.

19. But God's truth stands, and His promise is sure. He knows those who are His. So let all who believe in Jesus turn away from evil.

20. In expensive houses you'll find two kinds of dishes. Some are made of gold and silver for use on special occasions. Others are made of wood and clay and are used every day. But eventually they have to be thrown away.

21. That's how it is in the church. Those who stay away from sin are like gold or silver dishes. God can use them to do a special work for Him. But those who twist the truth are like broken dishes, which must be thrown away.

22-24. Stay away from evil things that young people like to do. Do what's right and focus on faith, love, and peace. And don't try to answer every foolish question people ask, because that only raises more questions and starts arguments. Use your energy for being a good pastor and teacher.

Always be gentle and kind to everyone. **25-26.** Humbly lead your people to a greater knowledge of the truth. Those who love to argue need to come to their senses. They need to escape the trap of the devil, who is using them to do what he wants.

The Last Days

3 In the last days it will be difficult to be a Christian. People will love themselves, and money will be their god. They'll be boastful, proud, disobedient to parents, unthankful, and just outright bad.

3. Many will not love their families. They will break agreements and say bad things about others. They will have no self-control. They will be cruel, and will hate whatever is right and good.

4-5. They will be reckless, untrustworthy, and lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. Outwardly they may act religious, but in their hearts they won't know God and will reject His power to change their lives. Stay away from people who do wicked things.

6-7. There are false teachers who go to the homes of women who are living sinful lives. Because the women feel so guilty, they listen. But they never come to the point of fully accepting the truth of the gospel.

8-9. These men are like the Egyptian magicians who challenged Moses. Their thinking is confused. They're against the truth. In time people will see that these men are no different than these magicians were.

10-11. But you know all about me. You've listened to my preaching and know the kind of life I've lived. You know my faith and my love for our people. You saw how I was persecuted, first in Antioch and then in other cities. But you also know how the Lord has rescued me.

12-13. All who love Jesus and live by what He taught will be shunned or persecuted. That's nothing new. But near the end evil men and false teachers will get worse and worse. They will try to deceive our people while they themselves are being deceived.

14-15. So continue to live up to the truth that you were taught by your mother and grandmother. When you were a child, they helped you memorize Scripture, which prepared your heart to accept Jesus as your Savior.

16-17. All Scripture is inspired by God. It teaches us what is true and tells us what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us and teaches us how to live right. This is God's way of helping us to be like Jesus and to be filled with love and good works.

Preach the Word

4 Timothy, I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus, who will come and judge the living and the dead. Preach the word of God whenever you can, whether it's convenient or not. Don't hesitate to correct people when they're doing wrong, but do it gently. Be patient with them and encourage them with good teaching.

3-4. There will come a time when people will not listen to the truth. They will find teachers who will tell them what their ears itch to hear. They will turn away from the truth to false teachings.

5. But as for you, take care of yourself. Be temperate in all things. Accept hard times as they come your way. Be willing to suffer for Jesus. Do the work of an evangelist and keep preaching the good news of the gospel.

Paul's Farewell

6-7. As for me, I'm ready to spill my blood as an offering to God. I believe that the emperor will give me the

death sentence this time. I have fought a good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.

8. So now the victory wreath is waiting for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me when He comes back. And not to me only, but to all who love Him and are eager for Him to return.

9-10. Do your best to come to see me as quickly as you can. Demas has deserted me. He loves worldly honor and has given up the faith and returned to Thessalonica. Crescens went to preach in Galatia, and Titus has gone to look after some of the other churches.

11. Only Luke, the faithful doctor, is with me. When you come, bring Mark with you. He's turned out to be a very dependable worker and can be a big help to me.

12-13. I've already sent Tychicus to Ephesus to take your place. Oh, yes, when you come, bring my winter coat with you. I left it at Carpus' house in Troas when I was taken away so quickly. Also bring my books and scrolls of Scripture. They give me so much comfort and courage.

14-15. Alexander, the idol maker from Ephesus, gave me a hard time. He's the one responsible for my arrest. The Lord will give him what he deserves. Watch out for him, because he

really hates the gospel.

16. I should tell you that at my first defense in front of the emperor, no one testified on my behalf. So I defended myself. I'm not holding it against anyone. I just pray that God will forgive them.

17. But the Lord was there to help me. No one there can say that he never heard the gospel. To my surprise and to the surprise of those who were present, the emperor didn't give me the death sentence, but sent me back to prison. I felt I was being delivered from a lion's mouth. But this time I'm not expecting him to set me free, as he did before.

18. I know that the Lord will deliver me from every temptation that the devil will try to use. Jesus will be with me when I die. And when He comes back, He'll resurrect me and take me home. To Him be glory now and forever. Amen.

A Final Word

19-20. Say hello to Priscilla and Aquila, also to Onesiphorus and his family. I should tell you that I left Erastus to care for the church in Corinth. And I told Trophimus to stay in Miletus and get some rest, because he wasn't feeling well.

21. Please try to come before winter. The believers here send their greetings.

22. May the Lord Jesus strengthen your spirit. God's grace be with you.

Titus

INTRODUCTION: *Paul wrote this letter to Titus, most likely from Corinth about A.D. 65. This was before Paul was arrested and sent to a prison in Rome a second time. Titus was looking after the churches on the large island of Crete. Paul reminded him that teaching from the Bible develops character, and that Christians should live for God and do good to others.*

Paul's Calling

1 From Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus. God sent me to tell people everywhere that by faith they can become God's children, and to teach them the truth so they can live godly lives.

2-3. We have the hope of eternal life because God promised it. And God cannot lie. He made this promise before the world began. Then at the right time He sent His Son to save us. This is the message He commanded me to preach.

4. To Titus, my son in the faith. May grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and from Jesus our Savior be with you always.

Elders

5. The reason I left you on the island of Crete was so you could do some things that still needed to be done. You need to choose and ordain pastors for all the churches there.

6-7. An elder must be someone who has a good reputation. He should have only one wife. His children should be believers and stay out of trouble. He should neither be proud nor quick-tempered, nor a lover of wine. He should not get into fights. Making money should not be his chief goal in life.

8-9. He should love people and invite them to his home. He should be wise and fair-minded. He should be self-disciplined and a sincere Christian. An elder should be able to teach Bible truths and point out the errors of those who oppose the gospel.

Church Discipline

10. A number of new believers on the island are not really converted. They are still demanding that people carry out certain Jewish rituals before they can be considered real Christians.

11. These men are troublemakers and must be stopped from teaching things that are not true. Their real purpose is to gain followers who will give them their tithes and offerings.

12. In fact, one of the island's early poets said, "The people of Crete are liars, cruel and lazy, who do nothing but eat."

13-14. It's true. You need to rebuke these people so that the church can have a healthy faith and be strong. Believers should stop listening to men who tell Jewish stories and teach things that are not true.

15-16. Those who are pure in heart know goodness when they see it. But those who are not converted see something wrong in everything. They

can't think straight and decide between right and wrong anymore. They say they know God, but their actions deny it. Because of their disobedience, they're useless for doing anything good.

Solid Teachings

2 Teach the people doctrines based on the Bible. Older men should be self-disciplined and stay away from wine. They need to be strong in faith, love, and commitment to Jesus.

3-4. Older women should be good examples to younger women. They should not speak evil of others, and should stay away from wine. They should teach the younger women how to be good wives and mothers.

5. Young women should love their husbands and children, be pure, temperate, and kind. They should be good housekeepers, live wisely, and help their husbands. Then people won't be able to look down on those who believe the Word of God.

6-8. For the same reason, you should teach younger men to live wisely and practice self-control. Be an example to them. In all of your teaching and preaching be honest, sensible, and sincere. Choose carefully what you say, so that your enemies won't have anything to say about you.

9-10. Encourage slaves who are new converts to obey their masters. Tell them to try their best to please them and not argue with them. Tell them not to steal from their masters. Instead, they should show how dependable they are in everything they do. This will make the teachings about God look beautiful and attract people to Jesus.

God's Grace

11-13. The grace of God is for every-

one. It teaches us to turn from evil and to live lives devoted to God. That's how we should live as we look forward to the coming of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

14. Jesus gave His life to rescue us from sin and to purify a special people for Himself. He wants to make us His very own, a people who are eager to do what's right and good.

15. Teach these things and continue to encourage our people. Gently correct them. God has given you authority to be a good shepherd. Don't let anyone think that what you say is not important.

Be Good Citizens

3 Remind our members to be good citizens, to obey the government and do whatever good they can. Tell them not to say bad things about people, but to live in peace and be courteous and friendly to all.

3-4. All of us were at one time foolish and disobedient. We were deceived and were slaves to pleasure. We were jealous of others and hated them, especially if they hated us. But when Jesus showed us how much God loves us, a new power started working in our lives.

5-6. God saved us, not because of the good things we did, but because of His great mercy. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we were born again and baptized as a witness to our new life in Jesus. Not only did God send the Holy Spirit for our good, but He continues to do all He can for us.

7. It is by God's grace that we are made right with Him. We are citizens of a new kingdom based on God's promise of eternal life.

8. These things are true. Keep emphasizing them so that our members will continue to do good. This is right, and it helps everyone.

Final Instructions

9. As I mentioned before, don't get involved in trying to answer foolish questions. Some people always want to start an argument. Senseless discussions don't help anyone to live a better Christian life.

10-11. If someone keeps stirring things up, ask him to stop. You may have to speak to him several times. If he still doesn't stop, don't waste your time with him. People like that don't think straight and have a wrong sense of values. They condemn themselves.

12-13. I'll be sending one of the two

men with me to take your place. When he gets there, then come to see me. I'll be at Nicopolis, where I plan to spend the winter. Zenas, the lawyer, and Apollos will stop by to deliver my letter. Do what you can to help them on their way. See to it that they have everything they need.

14. Once people are baptized, they should not live useless lives. They should learn to do good and to care for those in need.

15. All who are with me send their greetings. Pass them on to our fellow Christians. May God's grace be with all of you. Amen.

Philemon

INTRODUCTION: *This is a very short letter from Paul to his friend Philemon. He wrote it about A.D. 63, during his first imprisonment in Rome. We learn that a runaway slave named Onesimus had become a Christian and was doing all he could to help Paul. When Onesimus decided to go back to make things right, Paul asked Philemon to forgive Onesimus and to accept him as a brother.*

Greetings

1-3. From Paul, now a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and from Timothy, our brother, to Philemon, our dear friend and fellow worker. Share this letter with your wife and with Archippus your son, a fellow soldier for Jesus. Also share it with the believers who meet in your home. Grace and peace to all of you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ our Lord.

4-5. I remember you in my prayers and thank God for you. I'm happy to hear of your love for Jesus and the faith you still have in Him. Also, I hear of the love you show to all believers.

6-7. I pray that God will help you share your faith even more. And may you know even more fully the blessings that come through Christ Jesus. Your love for God's people has brought me great joy and comfort.

Paul Asks a Favor

8-10. I could boldly ask you to do almost anything, and you would do it. But as an old friend who's in jail for Christ's sake, I'm begging a favor. It's about Onesimus, your slave. He's been like a son to me. I taught him more of the gospel when he visited me here in jail.

11-13. At one time he was useless to

you and caused you trouble. But now he's changed and is very kind and useful to both of us. So I'm sending him back to you. With him I'm sending my heart. I would really like to keep him here, because he could help me while I'm in jail. He would do for me just what you would do if you were here.

14. I don't want you to feel obligated to do what I'm asking you to do. But if you take him back, do it because you want to, not because you feel I'm forcing you to do it.

15-16. All this may have happened for a good reason. Even though he ran away from you, he's coming back for as long as you want him. Now he's no longer your slave, but your dear brother in Jesus. That's what he is to me. And that's what he should be to you—a Christian brother.

17-18. If you and I are in partnership with Jesus, as you have told me so many times, then welcome him as you would welcome me. If he owes you anything, charge it to me.

19-20. I'm writing this letter myself, so you'll have it in my own handwriting. I will repay you everything he owes you. I won't mention what you owe me for the rich spiritual life you now have in Christ. So please do this

favor for me and for Jesus. You'll cheer my heart.

21-22. Knowing you as I do, I know that you'll do even more than I ask. Please get your guest room ready for me. I'm hoping that your prayers will help get me out of jail.

Final Greetings

23-25. Epaphras is a fellow Christian here in jail with me. He sends his greetings. So do the other believers working here in Rome—Mark, Demas, and the doctor, Luke. May the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you forever.

Hebrews

INTRODUCTION: *This is a very important book. Many believe that Paul wrote it about A.D. 66, between his first and second imprisonments in Rome. It was written to Jewish Christians; it showed them that Jesus was the Son of God and that He fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. The author told them that there was no need to sacrifice lambs anymore, because Jesus is the Lamb of God that takes away sin. The writer also said that from that point on, they should look to the heavenly sanctuary, where Jesus is serving as their high priest. We can tell Him all our problems, and He will work together with God to help us.*

God Has Spoken

1 In the past, God spoke to our ancestors though prophets. He did it many times and in many different ways. But in our time He has spoken to us through His Son, by whom He made the world and everything in it. This world belongs to Him.

3-4. Jesus is the reflection of God's glory. He's exactly like God. He holds the universe together by the power of His word. After He came and died for our sins, He went back to heaven. God invited Him to again sit down at His right side. This makes Him much greater than the angels.

5-6. When did God ever say to an angel, "You are My Son. Today I have become your Father"? Or did He ever say of an angel, "I'm his Father, and he's My Son. He's equal with Me"? But when Jesus came into the world, God told the angels to worship Him.

7. Angels are created beings who serve God in whatever way is needed. The Scripture says, "Angels are as fast as the wind and as powerful as flames of fire."

8-9. But to His Son God said, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. Righteousness is the foundation of Your kingdom. You love what is right and hate sin. Therefore I have set

You above everyone else. I have anointed You with gladness."

10-12. God also said to His Son, "You were with Me from the beginning. You were the one who created the earth and sky. They will get old and pass away, but You will remain. Like clothes, they will wear out. You will roll them up like an old robe and change them. But You will never change. You will always be the same. You will never grow old."

13. To which of the angels did God ever say, "Come, sit at My right side until I defeat your enemies; someday they will bow at your feet and acknowledge you as Lord"?

14. Angels are God's servants sent to help those who will be saved.

God's Gift of Salvation

2 Therefore, we should pay closer attention to what we were taught about the Messiah. Otherwise we will drift away from what God has told us.

2-4. The message He gave our ancestors through angels was true. When our people didn't listen they were punished. How can we expect to be treated differently if we do the same? From the beginning of His ministry Jesus said that He came to save us.

This was confirmed by God through miracles and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Lower Than Angels

5-7. God did not turn this world over to angels to take care of. The Scripture says, "God made man a little lower than the angels. He gave Adam honor and glory and put him in charge of this world."

8-9. But when Jesus came, God turned everything over to Him, including the angels. Right now we can't see this. But we know that Jesus came as a man, and suffered and died to save the world. Now He's crowned with glory and honor.

God's Plan for Jesus

10-11. It was right for God to carry out His plan to let Jesus come and through suffering become a perfect Savior. He did this so that as many of us as possible could be saved. Therefore Jesus, who is holy, and those who are being made holy have the same Father. That's why Jesus calls us His brothers and sisters.

12-13. He promised God that He would tell us about His Father. He would praise and honor God's name. He also promised that He would trust God and would bring those who belong to Him back home.

Jesus Made Like Us

14-15. Since those of us on earth have bodies of flesh and blood, Jesus took on the same. This way, by dying on the cross and being raised from the dead, He could break the power of death that the devil held over us. So He freed us not only from slavery to sin but also from the fear of death.

16-18. There's no need for Him to help sinless angels out of sin. He came to help us. That's why He was made like us—so He could serve as

our High Priest, bring us close to God, and through His sacrifice take away our sins. He knows how to help us, because He too suffered and was tempted.

Jesus Greater Than Moses

3 My dear fellow believers, now that you have responded to God's call, think about Jesus, our great High Priest. He was as faithful to God as Moses was.

3-4. But we need to honor Jesus more than Moses. Why? Because the builder of a house is more important than the house. Every house is built by someone, but God built everything to begin with.

5-6. Moses was a faithful servant and told us what God would do. But Jesus is in charge of His house, which is made up of God's people. So let's hold on to our confidence in God and the hope that we have in Jesus.

Don't Be Stubborn

7-8. The Holy Spirit is speaking through the Scriptures when He says, "Listen to what God is trying to tell you. Don't be stubborn, as your ancestors were, and end up rebelling against God."

9-11. God said to them, "For forty years you questioned My love. That's why I said to Moses, 'These people never seem to learn. Their hearts are always somewhere else. They never do what I ask them to do.' So I couldn't give them the spiritual rest I had promised, no matter how much I loved them."

12-13. Brothers and sisters, we need to be careful that we don't question God's love and rebel against Him as our ancestors did. We need to encourage each other in the faith. Otherwise our hearts will grow hard because of Satan's lies and tricks.

14-15. We will all have a share in Jesus' victory if we hold firm to the end the faith we have in Him. Don't forget the warning in Scripture: "If you hear God's voice, don't be stubborn, as your ancestors were when they rebelled against Him."

16-17. Who rebelled against God? The people who came out of Egypt led by Moses. They saw the miracles that God did for them. But who were the ones who displeased God for forty years in the wilderness? Those who refused to listen to Him. So God had to let that generation die in the wilderness.

18-19. Who was God speaking to when He said, "I will not let them enter Canaan; I will not give spiritual rest to those who disobey Me"? He was talking to His own people. He couldn't take that generation into Canaan and give their hearts spiritual rest, because they didn't believe what He had said.

God's Spiritual Rest

4 So let's be careful that we don't make the same mistake our ancestors made. If we do, we won't receive the rest the God talked about, and won't be taken to the heavenly Canaan.

2. The same gospel was preached to them through the sanctuary services as is being preached today. But what they saw and heard didn't help many of them, because they didn't believe what God promised.

3-4. That's why He said, "I can never give those who don't believe in Me spiritual rest." This is the rest He had in mind when He finished creating this world. God Himself rested on the seventh day.

5-6. God said, "Those who don't believe Me will never be given My rest."

Over the years God kept inviting people to come to Him. Some did, but others didn't, because they refused to believe what He said.

7-8. In David's time God again appealed to His people, saying, "Listen to Me. Don't harden your hearts." Now, if God had been thinking about the land of Canaan when He talked about rest, why would He appeal to His people again in David's time? As important as the rest of Canaan was in Joshua's time, that was not the rest God had in mind.

9-10. So the invitation to come to God for spiritual rest is still good today. This is what God has in mind for each of us. Those who believe God and come to Him for rest will stop working for their salvation, just as He stopped His work at the end of creation week.

11. So let's not follow the example of our ancestors who didn't believe what God said.

12-13. God's word is like a sharp sword. It cuts open our hearts and even cuts deep into our bones to show us why we do things. Nothing is hidden from Him. He knows everything we do, and even what we're thinking. We must answer to Him for the life that we have lived.

Jesus, the Center of Our Faith

14. God gave us a wonderful High Priest—Jesus, the Son of God. He lived with us, then went back to heaven into the very presence of God to help us. So let's hold on to our faith in Him.

15-16. We don't have a High Priest who can't understand us or who doesn't feel our pain. He was tempted more severely than we will ever be tempted, yet He never sinned. So let's feel free to come to God and ask Him for the grace and help we need.

The Priesthood

5 When a new high priest is chosen to serve in the Temple in Jerusalem, he's chosen from among the priests. He's expected to speak to God for the people through prayers and offerings. He deals kindly with those who don't understand or who have sinned. He too is human and has to overcome his weaknesses.

3-4. So he has to pray and offer sacrifices, not only for the sins of the people but also for his own sins. But he doesn't choose this work for himself. He is given that honor because God

gave it to Aaron and his descendants.

5-6. Even though Jesus was qualified, He didn't make Himself High Priest. God chose Him. He said to Jesus, "You are My Son and You will be High Priest forever. You are not from the family of Aaron, but a different kind of priest."

7. So Jesus became one of us. While He was here He kept praying for help to overcome the temptations of Satan. In the Garden of Gethsemane He cried and prayed for help, and again on the cross. God heard Him. And because Jesus had been totally obedient, God resurrected Him.

8-10. Even though Jesus was the Son of God, He had to learn the real meaning of obedience. He learned it from the things that He suffered. And having lived a perfect life, He became the source of eternal life for all who believe and obey Him. That's why God made Jesus High Priest of a different order.

The Need to Understand

11. I could tell you much more about all this, but it's hard to put it in writing. And even if I did, you probably wouldn't understand it unless I explained it to you personally.

12. By now you ought to be teaching others how to be saved. But you need

someone to teach you. Babies are fed milk; and as they grow they are given solid food. But you aren't ready for solid food.

13-14. Spiritual milk is for those who have not grown in their walk with the Lord from their study of Scripture. Solid spiritual food is for those who are spiritually mature. They have a strong faith in Jesus and have learned the difference between right and wrong teachings.

The Christian Faith

6 Let's stop going over the basic teachings of Christ and go on to some of the deeper things of God. We shouldn't have to explain again that we must be sorry for our sins, that we can't earn salvation, and that we must have faith in God and obey Him because we love Him.

2-3. Nor should we have to keep talking about the importance of baptism, the Holy Spirit, the certainty of the resurrection, and the final judgment. But, God willing, we will do this.

4-5. Now, what about people who have accepted Jesus as their Savior and then left the faith? They were given spiritual gifts and were helpful in the church. They studied the Scriptures and saw miracles taking place.

6. Then they gave up their faith in Jesus. If they continue to make fun of the Christian faith, it will be impossible to bring them back. They are nailing Jesus to the cross and are shaming Him all over again.

7-8. Let's look at nature. God sends the rain; the ground drinks it in and produces a harvest. But if the field isn't worked right, all it will produce for the owner is weeds, which are worth nothing. Then he will have to clear the field by setting it on fire.

9-11. But, dear friends, we expect to

hear better things of you as you learn more about Jesus. God will not forget your hard work and the love you have shown for Him by helping His people. Keep it up. This will strengthen your hope in what is to come.

12. Don't become casual about your faith. Follow the example of those who endured the wilderness until they reached the land of Canaan that God had promised them.

God Doesn't Lie

13-14. God promised Abraham that He would bless him. He did this with an oath. Since He couldn't swear by anyone greater, He used His own name and said to Abraham, "I promise to bless you and give you a son. Through him I will greatly multiply your descendants."

15. Abraham held on to that promise. Even though his faith weakened at times, he was patient. He had a son, as God had promised.

16-17. When people make serious promises, they swear by the name of someone above them. This oath makes it legal and ends all discussion. God wanted Abraham to know that what He said He meant, so He took an oath in His own name to prove it.

18. So God's promise rests on two things: He took an oath, and He doesn't lie. This gives us courage and strength to hold on to the hope we have.

19-20. This assurance is the anchor of our lives. Our hope is not in ourselves but in Christ. Hope takes us right into God's presence, where Jesus is serving as our High Priest forever.

Abraham

7In the days of Abraham there was a priest who served God, who was also king of the city of Salem. He went to meet Abraham returning from

defeating four city kings and rescuing his nephew Lot. When they met, this king blessed Abraham.

2. Then Abraham, knowing that this man was a priest of God, gave him one tenth of all he had taken from the four kings. This man's name was Melchizedek, which means "king of righteousness." The city he ruled was Salem, meaning "peace." So he was also "king of peace."

3-4. The Scriptures don't say anything about his father and mother or about his birth and death. So in this sense he pointed forward to Jesus, who had no beginning, nor will His days ever end. Just think how important this king of Salem was in the eyes of Abraham. He gave Melchizedek one tenth of all he had won in battle.

5-6. We know that our people gave their tithes to the Levites for their work as priests. But the king of Salem did not come from the tribe of Levi, because Levi hadn't even been born yet. Yet Abraham gave this priest his tithe. And Melchizedek blessed him even though Abraham was the father of nations.

7-8. We know that the one who blesses is greater than the one who is being blessed. We also know that priests who receive tithe finally die. But Melchizedek received tithe from Abraham, and we have no record that he ever died.

9-10. His priesthood represented the unborn priesthood of Jesus. The Levites accepted this because of what Abraham had done. So long before there were Jewish Levites and priests, there was already a priesthood.

Jesus' Priesthood

11-12. Now if what the Levites and priests did would make people spiritually perfect, why would the Scriptures

talk about the need of another priesthood? And if the priesthood had to change, there also had to be a new way of choosing a priest.

13-14. Now this other priesthood came from a tribe other than Levi's. Nowhere does Moses say that our priests would come from Judah, but Jesus was from Judah. He was appointed by God to be our High Priest.

15-17. This makes him like the king of Salem, who was also appointed by God to be a priest, with no recorded birth or death. Jesus became High Priest when God said to His Son, "You are a priest like Melchizedek."

18-19. So the old rituals of the Levites and priests at the Temple are no longer needed. Besides, those rituals were weak and could not change people's lives. All they could do was point us to Jesus. So now we have a better hope, because through Jesus we ourselves can come into the very presence of God.

20-22. Jesus became our High Priest by an oath. Levites became priests by inheritance. God said to Jesus, "I have taken an oath and will not change My mind. You are High Priest forever." Jesus is a much better priest, because He can change us, give us eternal life, and fulfill God's promise to Abraham.

23-25. Priests die. But Jesus lives forever. His priesthood is not passed on to someone else. He can save anyone who comes to Him for help. He represents us before the Father until God's plan for saving people is finished.

26-28. Jesus is the High Priest we need. He is pleasing to God. He is innocent and pure. Now He is ministering for us in the heavenly sanctuary. He doesn't need to sacrifice lambs and goats, as priests have done. He is the sacrifice, the Lamb of God. He died for our sins once and for all. In

Moses' day imperfect men served as priests. But God's Son is our High Priest. He is perfect forever.

Jesus in Heaven

8 The whole point of what I've said is this: Our new High Priest took His seat to the right of the God of heaven and earth. He is serving in the true sanctuary, made by God and not by man.

3. Every high priest who served in the earthly sanctuary was expected to bring sacrifices and offerings. So as Jesus ministers in heaven, He must also have an offering.

4-5. If He were still on earth, He wouldn't serve as a priest, because it's the priests' duty to offer all kinds of sacrifices. But what they do only points to what is taking place in heaven. This is what God had in mind when He said to Moses, "Build a sanctuary exactly like the plan you saw on the mountain."

6. But Jesus' ministry in heaven is so much better than the ministry of priests in the earthly sanctuary. The agreement that He carries out for God on behalf of His people is based on promises.

The Old Priesthood

7. If the first agreement God made with Moses under the old priesthood had been perfect, why make a new one under the priesthood of Jesus?

8. People misunderstood the old priesthood. They had faith in it instead of in what Jesus would do for them. So God said, "The time is coming when I will make a new agreement with My people."

9-10. "I will no longer speak to them through symbols, as I did when I brought them out of Egypt. Now I will speak to them through the promises

that have already been fulfilled. I will put My laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people.

11-12. "No one will have to teach them, saying, 'Come, let me tell you about God.' The people will already know Me, from the least to the greatest. I will forgive the bad things they have done. I will not remember their sins anymore."

13. When God talked about His new plan, He was not saying that the agreement He had made with Abraham was bad. He meant only that the old plan of the priesthood with its rituals and symbols was no longer needed.

The Earthly Sanctuary

9 Under the old priesthood there were certain rules for worship. The people were told to make a tent, called the sanctuary, with two rooms. In the first room there was the seven-branched candlestick and the table with the special bread. That room was called the Holy Place.

3-4. A curtain separated it from the Most Holy Place. The little golden altar of incense was right in front of the curtain. Behind the curtain was the golden ark. In it there was a golden pot of manna, Aaron's rod that had budded, and the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets.

5. Above the ark were two beautifully carved angels with outstretched wings. Between these two angels the Lord's presence would appear as a brilliant light. I won't take time right now to explain the meaning of each piece of furniture.

6-7. Whenever our ancestors moved, the Levites took down the sanctuary tent. Later they put it up again. The priests carried out their duties in the

Holy Place. Once a year the high priest went into the Most Holy Place. But before he went in he had to offer a sacrifice for himself and for the people.

8-10. The Holy Spirit used these rituals to teach us important things about the heavenly sanctuary. The services of Jesus in heaven didn't begin until the earthly services ended. Earthly gifts, sacrifices, washings, and rituals couldn't take away sin. Those things just pointed forward to when Jesus would come to fulfill God's promise.

The Heavenly Sanctuary

11-12. Jesus fulfilled God's promise when He came and died for our sins. Now He's ministering as High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary that was built by God, not by human hands. He didn't have to take the blood of a lamb with Him. He offered His own blood, because He was the perfect Lamb of God.

13-14. The blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer made our ancestors at least feel clean. How much more can the blood of Christ make us really clean! He offered Himself as a sacrifice to make our hearts pure. And He freed us from the idea of depending on our own works for salvation.

15. That is why Jesus is the true Mediator and High Priest: He paid for our sins and rescued us from eternal death. Jesus did this not only for us, but for all those who lived under the old priesthood. They too were offered eternal life through Him.

Salvation

16-18. This whole arrangement is something like a will that a man makes before he dies. It doesn't take effect while he is still living. Christ

died leaving us an inheritance. That's why the old symbols of salvation had no meaning without the death of lambs, which pointed to Jesus' death.

19-22. Moses would sacrifice an animal. Then he would sprinkle some blood on the book of the law, some toward the people, and some on the sanctuary tent. This was to remind them that sins couldn't be forgiven without the shedding of blood.

23-24. The earthly sanctuary had to be sprinkled with the blood of a lamb, but the heavenly sanctuary had to have a much better sacrifice. So Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. But He didn't stay here to serve in the sanctuary on earth. He went to heaven to serve in the sanctuary there. That's where He is now, helping us.

25-26. Here the high priest went into the Most Holy Place once every year with the blood of an animal. Jesus shed His own blood. And He died once, and that was enough. Otherwise He would have had to come and die every year since sin began.

27-28. People die once, and then face the judgment. Jesus died once to take away our sins. He will not have to die for sin again. When He comes the second time, He will destroy all sin. And He will take to heaven those who are looking forward to seeing Him.

Jesus' Sacrifice

10 The sanctuary on earth was only a shadow of the real sanctuary in heaven. Though the priests offered sacrifices every day, they had no power to take away sin and make the people pure in God's sight.

2-4. If they could have, then why did the priests have to keep offering sacrifices? It's impossible for the blood of animals to take away our sins and change our hearts.

5-7. When Jesus was about to come into this world, He said to the Father, "I know it's not animal sacrifices that You really want. You're planning to give Me a human body for a sacrifice that counts." After He came He said, "Father, I'm here to do Your will, just what is written about Me in the Scriptures."

8-10. Notice the order. First He said that animal sacrifices are not what God really wants. Then He talked about doing God's will. From this you can see that sacrifices were only temporary until Jesus came. It's because of His obedience and death on the cross that we're cleansed from sin. And this sacrifice doesn't have to be repeated.

11-12. Every day priests keep offering sacrifices which can never take away sin. But when Jesus came, He offered one sacrifice forever. Then He went to heaven and sat down next to God. His work on earth was finished.

13-14. Now He's waiting for the time to come when all people, even His enemies, will recognize His rightful authority. Because of this one sacrifice, Jesus can now present us to God and to the universe as if we were already holy and perfect.

15-18. God spoke through the Holy Spirit to a prophet. He said, "This is My promise: I will put My laws in their hearts and write them on their minds. I will forgive them and will not remember their sins anymore." As we know, it's not necessary to offer sacrifices for sins that have already been forgiven.

Confidence

19-20. Therefore, we can go into the holy places of the heavenly sanctuary with confidence because of the blood of Jesus. His body is like the curtain in the earthly sanctuary. We come into

the presence of God through Him.

21-23. Since our High Priest is in charge of the heavenly sanctuary, let's come to God with confidence. We have been forgiven, and our hearts are clean. And our bodies have been washed in the waters of baptism. So let's hold on to the hope we have in Jesus, and remember that God is faithful and keeps His promises.

24-25. Now let's think about doing good and helping people to love Jesus. Don't give up worshiping together, as some have already done. This becomes even more important when you see the signs of Christ's coming.

26-27. If we deliberately keep on sinning and turn against the truth about Jesus, where can we go to have our sins forgiven? All we can do then is dread the day of judgment, when we will be destroyed together with our sins.

28. In the days of Moses anyone who stubbornly held on to his sins was punished. If they were really wicked, they were put to death. But this was not done unless proof was given by two or three witnesses.

29. If that was done back then, how much more will it happen to those who turn against the Son of God? Whoever thinks Jesus' death was nothing special is rejecting God's grace and insulting the Holy Spirit.

30-31. We know that God said, "I will punish people who do wrong." Moses said, "The Lord Himself will judge the people." It will be a terrible thing to have to face God while our hearts are still full of sin.

Remember

32-33. Do you remember when God's light and truth first came into your hearts? Then you were willing to suffer for Jesus. People made fun of you

and insulted you. Some of you lost your jobs, and your families disowned you. But still you were willing to defend your faith in Jesus and to worship with like believers.

34. You suffered along with those in prison. When people broke into your houses and stole from you, you accepted it and smiled. Some of you even had your property taken away. You didn't worry, because you knew that you had something better waiting for you in heaven.

35-36. Don't stop believing what Jesus has done for you, because your loyalty will be rewarded. Keep on doing God's will, and one of these days you'll receive what God has promised.

37-38. As the Bible says: "Just a little longer, and He who came the first time will come again. When it's time to come, He will not wait. Those who have been made right with God because of their faith will be given eternal life. But the Lord will not be pleased with those who turned their back on Him."

39. We are not like those who turn their backs on Jesus and will be lost. We continue to place our faith in Him until our salvation is complete.

A History of Faith

11 To have faith means to be sure of the things we hope for. It means being certain of what we can't see. It was by faith that our ancestors won God's approval.

3. Faith in God reaches not only into the future but also into the past. By faith we believe that God created the universe out of nothing. So the things we see were made out of things we can't see.

From Abel to Noah

4. Abel showed his faith in a promised Savior by sacrificing a lamb. Cain of-

ferred only grain. God accepted Abel's offering but not Cain's. Abel was killed for what he believed. His faith is still an example to us.

5. Enoch had that same kind of faith. He spent a lot of time talking to God in prayer, and he obeyed God. God was so pleased with him that Enoch never died. Instead he was taken to heaven. Family and friends looked for him but couldn't find him.

6. Without faith it's impossible to please God. You must believe that He is real and that He loves you. Also, He will reward anyone who really wants to understand Him and become like Him.

7. Noah is another example of faith. It had never rained before. God told Noah that a big flood was coming and that he should build a large boat for his family. Noah did. People made fun of him and the ark. Later they were sorry, but it was too late. Noah's faith made him right with God.

Abraham

8-10. God asked Abraham to leave his home and travel to a foreign country that God promised to give him. Abraham believed God and obeyed. He and his family lived in tents. But by faith he looked forward to living in a city built by God.

11-12. When Abraham and Sarah were very, very old, God promised that they would have a baby. Although they were old, they believed that promise. So God worked a miracle, and they had a baby boy. Today there are so many descendants of Abraham that they're as hard to count as the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on a beach.

13-14. All these people died still believing God's promises, even though the promises had not all been fulfilled.

They knew that He would keep them. They felt as though they were just visitors here, on their way to a better land. They lived for the future, remembering what God had promised.

15-16. If Abraham had wanted to go back to his comfortable home, he could have. But they believed that God would keep His promise. So God is not ashamed to be their God and has prepared a city for them.

The Patriarchs

17-19. By faith in God's promise, Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac when he was tested. God had said, "Your descendants will come from Isaac." And Abraham believed it. He knew that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead to keep His promise.

20-22. Isaac had this same kind of faith in God when he blessed Jacob and Esau. By faith Jacob included the two sons of Joseph in his blessing before he died. And Joseph showed this same kind of faith when he told his brothers that one day their families would leave Egypt. And when they did, they should take his body with them.

Moses

23. By faith Moses' parents went against the king's command and hid their baby for three months. They believed that God had something special in mind for him.

24-25. Moses showed this same kind of faith after growing up in the palace of the king. He refused to be known as the son of the king's daughter. He would rather suffer hardship with God's people than to live in the palace and enjoy the pleasures of sin even for a little while.

26-27. He would rather suffer disgrace for Christ than have all the treasures of Egypt. He looked away from this

world to God's promised reward. So by faith he left Egypt. Moses was not afraid of the king, because he knew that God was walking by his side.

28. By faith he also returned to Egypt and told the people to prepare for the Passover. He told them to put the blood of a lamb on their doorposts so their firstborn sons wouldn't be killed.

29. By faith the children of Israel left Egypt. They walked through the Red Sea as if on dry land. When the Egyptian army came after them, the sea closed up, and all the soldiers drowned.

God's People

30-31. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after the Israelites walked around them for seven days. By faith Rahab was saved because she believed in the God of Israel. She had hidden the spies at the risk of her own life. But those who turned against the God of Israel were killed.

32-33. There have been many such people of faith. There isn't time or space for me to tell you about all of them. There was Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. By faith they conquered kingdoms and carried out justice. Because of Daniel's faith, God shut the lions' mouths.

34. By faith the three Hebrews were not burned in the fiery furnace. By faith Esther went into the king's presence and saved her people. By faith armies were made strong and defeated their enemies.

35-36. It was by faith that women received their dead loved ones back to life. Others chose torture and death rather than giving up their faith. They looked forward to the resurrection and a better life. Many were laughed at, whipped, arrested, chained, and put in prison.

37-38. Others were stoned to death, sawed in half, or killed by the sword. Still others were persecuted and mistreated. For them the comforts of this world were not worth losing their faith. They became refugees and wandered in deserts and mountains, making their homes in caves and holes in the ground.

39-40. What a record of faith these people have! They held on, even though they didn't receive everything that God had promised. God has something better in mind. He didn't want to completely fulfill His promise to them without us.

The Race of Faith

12 Since we have so many examples of faith, let's get rid of any weight that slows us down in our Christian race, especially the sin that keeps us from getting ahead. Let's run with endurance, following the path that God has set before us.

2. Let's keep our eyes on Jesus the source and goal of our faith. It was by faith that He looked past His own suffering to the joy of seeing us in heaven with Him. That's why He was willing to endure the cross and its shame. Then He went back to heaven to sit next to His Father and share His throne.

God's Love

3-4. Just think of what Jesus went through for us. Think of the hatred and pain He had to endure at the hands of sinners! So don't lose heart and give up your faith. In your fight against sin, you haven't had to suffer as Jesus did.

5-6. Remember the words of Solomon, "Don't shrug off the discipline of the Lord or become discouraged. He dis-

ciplines those He loves like a loving father who cares about his children."

7-8. God lets these things happen to train you. He is treating you as His dear children. What child is not disciplined by his father? Parents don't discipline other people's children. But God disciplines us because He loves us and is our heavenly Father.

9-10. We had fathers who had to discipline us in love. We respect them for it. How much more should we respect and accept our heavenly Father's discipline and receive eternal life! Our parents trained us for a few short years as they thought best. God disciplines us for our good, to make us more like Him.

11. No one enjoys discipline. In fact, it can be painful. But later, if we learn to do what's right, we're glad that our parents trained us.

Courage

12-13. So don't get discouraged and let your faith become weak and your knees shake. Walk on the path that is straight so that those weak legs can be healed and become strong.

14-15. Do your best to be at peace with each other and keep on living the Christian life. Those who don't will never see God. Be careful not to lose your hold on Jesus by letting bitterness come into your heart. This will hurt not only you but others as well.

16-17. Don't give in to sin or become as foolish as Esau. Just like that, he traded his inheritance and spiritual leadership for one meal. Afterward he was sorry and begged his father, Isaac, to give it back to him. But his father couldn't undo what had been done, no matter how hard Esau cried.

Two Mountains

18. You're not standing in front of Mount Sinai as our ancestors did.

That day fire burned at the top of it. Dark clouds rolled down the sides of the mountain. Lightning flashed, and thunder shook the ground.

19-21. Suddenly a blast like the sound of a trumpet came from the top of the mountain. Then God spoke the Ten Commandments, and when our ancestors heard Him speak, they begged Him to stop. They were scared to death. Even Moses said, "I'm shaking with fear."

22. Now, in our hearts, we are standing in front of Mount Zion, the New Jerusalem. It's the city of the living God. Thousands and thousands of angels are there.

23. We are part of that great throng of people whose names are written in heaven. We have all the rights of a firstborn. We can stand in the presence of God, the Judge of the whole world, unafraid, together with all the other good people.

24. Jesus is our Mediator and speaks a good word for us. His blood is much better than Abel's blood, which only called for justice.

The End Will Come

25. So don't refuse to listen to God when He speaks. Our ancestors wouldn't listen to God speak to them through Moses, so they were punished. Now God is speaking to us through Jesus. Don't you think we will be punished in some way if we refuse to listen to Him?

26-27. When God spoke from Mount Sinai, His voice shook the earth. He has promised to do it once more. He said, "Next time I will shake not only the earth but the heavens as well." At the end of the world everything earthly will be shaken, but that which is right and pure will remain.

28-29. Therefore, let's be thankful that

we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken and destroyed. Let's worship God with hearts full of gratitude, reverence, and awe. His presence is like a consuming fire, burning up everything evil.

Practical Advice

13 Keep on loving each other, as Christians should. Remember to make strangers feel welcome, both in your meetings and in your homes. Those who have done this have sometimes entertained angels without knowing it.

3. Remember those who are being mistreated for their faith, and do what you can for them. It could happen to you.

4. Marriage is sacred and should be honored by all. God will judge those who are unfaithful and don't keep it pure.

5-6. Be happy with what you have, and don't keep wanting more. God has promised, "I will never leave you or forget you." We can say what David said: "The Lord is my helper. I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me that would change my love for God?"

7-8. Remember your leaders, those people who taught you the word of God. Think back on all the good that has come from their lives. Then copy their faith, and trust the Lord, just as they did. Jesus' love for us never changes. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever.

9-10. Don't be deceived by wrong teachings. Our Christian life needs to grow by God's grace. Don't think that eating a piece of meat from a sacrifice offered at the Temple will make you holy. We already have a sacrifice. It's Jesus.

11-12. Once a year the high priest

takes the blood of a sacrificed animal into the Most Holy Place. But its body is taken outside the city and burned. That's why Jesus was crucified outside the city.

13. In our hearts let's follow Jesus outside the city of Jerusalem to Calvary. And let's be willing to accept the same shame and disgrace for Him that He did for us.

14-15. We don't have a city here that lasts forever. We look for one that is still to come. So let's offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God.

16. Don't forget to share what you have with those in need. Such sacrifices please God.

Pray for Your Leaders

17. Obey your church leaders and pray for them. They work very hard for you, because they must give account to God for their churches. Do what you can to help them so that they can work with joy, not groaning. That wouldn't help either you or the church.

18-19. Please keep praying for us. Even though we have a clear conscience in what we're doing, we want to continue to do what's right. Also, please pray that God will let me come to see you soon.

A Prayer

20-21. I pray that the God of peace will help you in whatever way you need, so that you can do what pleases Him. To our Father and to Jesus, that Good Shepherd who died for our sins according to God's plan, be glory and honor forever. Amen.

A Final Word

22-23. In closing, I beg you to take this letter to heart. I've written it to encourage you. It's not very long. I also

want you to know that Timothy is out of prison. If he comes to see me soon, we'll both come to see you.

24-25. Give our greetings to your

leaders and church members, those precious saints of God. The believers here in Italy send their greetings. May God's grace be with you. Amen.

James

INTRODUCTION: *This book was written by James, brother of Jesus. He wrote it about A.D. 48. We learn that God is not the one who brings troubles on us. Also, we should treat everyone the same, whether they're rich or poor. We should not use bad words or criticize others, but should show our faith by what we do. James reminds us that prayer is powerful; it can even heal the sick, if God thinks that is best.*

Greetings

1 From James, a servant of God and Jesus, to Jewish believers scattered everywhere.

Faith and Wisdom

2-4. My dear friends, try to face your trials with joy. They may test your faith, but when it's over, your faith will be stronger. So let your faith be tested. You will have learned to endure and be more like Jesus.

5-6. If you need wisdom, ask God for it. He enjoys giving it to everyone who asks. But when you pray, trust God that your prayers will be answered. If you think that maybe He will or maybe He won't, you're like the waves of the sea that are blown by the wind.

7-8. Don't think that God will answer prayer for those who doubt. If you can't make up your mind about God and prayer, how about the other things you believe?

The Rich and the Poor

9-10. If a member is poor, he should never forget how rich he is in Jesus. And a rich member should never forget how poor he is without Jesus. Whether a man is rich or poor, someday he will die.

11. Life is like a flower that blooms in the morning, droops under the noon-day sun, and dies in the evening, its beauty is gone. That's how short a man's life is compared to God's. No matter how successful we are, as we go about our work life is clicking away.

Temptations

12. The person who remains true to God, no matter what his troubles are, should be happy. For he will be given eternal life, which the Lord has promised to all who love Him.

13-15. When someone is tempted to sin, he shouldn't think that God is doing it just to test him. God doesn't do that. Temptation comes from our own evil desires and leads us away from God. Then we end up sinning. And sin brings death.

16-17. So don't be fooled. Everything good in life is a gift from our heavenly Father. He's not like shadows that keep changing. He is always good and never changes.

18. God chose to create us in spite of the risks involved. He also gave us a new birth and the truth of His word to help us along the way. All this makes us the choicest of His possessions.

Listen to God

19-20. Listen to God speak to you through His word. Be careful what you say. Don't lose your temper. When you're angry, you aren't showing others that you love Jesus. And God isn't able to use you to help them.

21. So get rid of anything bad in your life. Don't be proud. Be humble and accept the word of truth that has been planted in your heart to protect and save you.

22-24. Now, don't think that all you have to do is listen to God's word. You must do what it says. A person who just listens is like a man who looks into a mirror and sees that his face is dirty. Then he walks away and doesn't do anything about it.

25. But if a person looks into the mirror of God's law and sees that he needs Jesus, that's good. Then if he puts what the law says into practice, God will bless him.

26-27. Anyone who thinks he's good but can't control his tongue is fooling himself. His religion is worthless. A real Christian thinks about helping others, especially the orphans and widows. He will not let himself be touched by the filth of this world. This is the kind of religion our heavenly Father approves and wants us to have.

Prejudice

2 My dear friends, don't say that you believe in Jesus, and then show more respect for certain people than for others.

2-3. Suppose a well-dressed visitor and shabbily dressed visitor come to your church. You might greet the first one kindly and with great respect and then take him to the most comfortable seat in the church. But suppose you tell the second one, "Stand in the

back," or "You may sit on the floor."

4. How can you judge someone by how they're dressed? Doesn't that tell you something about yourself?

5. Listen to me. Doesn't God want the poor in this world to be rich in faith? Won't they also inherit the kingdom God promised to those who love Him?

6-7. So don't took down on those who are poor and pay attention only to the rich. It's the rich unbelievers who drag you into court. They even say bad things about Jesus, in whose name you were baptized.

8-10. If you really want to live by God's law, love other people as you do yourself. That means treating rich and poor people alike. If you don't, you're committing a sin. And if you break one commandment, you're just as guilty as if you had broken all of them.

11. The same God who said, "Don't be unfaithful in marriage," also said, "Don't kill anyone." If you keep one commandment but break another, doesn't this make you a lawbreaker? You're disobeying God.

12-13. So speak and act like those who know that they will be judged by the law of freedom. It points us to Jesus, who sets us free from sin. But there will be no mercy for those who are not kind and merciful to others. Those who do can be happy in Jesus, and don't have to worry about the judgment.

Faith Made Visible

14. Now, tell me what good is it if you say you have faith but your life tells a different story. Can words without actions save you?

15-17. When church members need clothes or food and you say, "We'll pray for you," but you don't do anything to help them, your words mean nothing. Your faith is worth nothing. Faith without action is dead.

18. Some say that certain people have the gift of faith and others the gift of action. My answer is How can people tell that you have faith if they don't see you do anything? People see my faith by what I do, not just by what I say.

19-20. You believe there is a God, and that's good. The devil and his angels also believe, but look what they do. So how foolish can you be not to see a difference?

21-22. Look at Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice his son because of his faith in God. Can't you see that his faith and his actions went together?

23. The Scripture says, "Abraham believed God, and because of what he did, his faith was accepted as genuine." That's why he was called God's friend.

24. From that, you can see that what we do will tell others if our faith is genuine or not. Therefore we are made right with God by a faith that acts, not just talks.

25. It was the same with Rahab, who lived in Jericho. She showed her faith in the God of Israel by hiding the spies and then helping them to escape.

26. Just as a person's body is useless if it doesn't breathe, so our faith is worthless without action.

The Tongue

3 Brothers, don't put everyone who thinks he can lead or teach into office. God expects more of leaders and teachers than of others.

2. All of us make mistakes and say things we shouldn't. If someone can control what he says, he's a good man. And he can control his tongue, he can control his whole body.

3-4. When we ride a horse, we put a bit in its mouth. Then we can control its whole body. How about a big ship? It's controlled by a small rudder that

makes it go wherever the captain steers it.

5-6. That's how powerful our tongue is. Even though it's small, it can do a lot of damage. It takes only a small flame to start a forest fire. A tongue is a flame of fire. It can ruin a person's life as if his body had been set on fire by Satan himself.

7-8. People have been able to tame all kinds of wild animals, such as birds, snakes, and even huge fish. But they haven't been able to tame their own wicked tongue. It's full of deadly poison.

9-10. Unless the tongue is controlled, it can praise God one minute and curse those created in His image the next. Words of praise and cursing can come out of the same mouth. This shouldn't be.

11-12. Does good and bad water come out of the same spring? Can a fig tree produce olives? Can a grapevine grow figs? Neither can a salty spring give you fresh water.

13. If you are wise and understand God's ways, then show it by the way you live. Don't brag about yourself and the good you do. Good things said and done in humility show how truly wise you are.

14. If you have jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't think you're so smart. Don't brag about your wisdom. Don't deny the truth about yourself. It's the worst kind of lie there is.

15-16. Such thinking is not from heaven. It's from the devil. Where there is anger, jealousy, and selfish ambition, you'll find confusion and all kinds of other evils.

17-18. The wisdom that comes from heaven is very different. First of all, it's pure, then peaceful, gentle, and easy to get along with. It's also kind,

and helps others. Heavenly wisdom is not partial or two-faced. Fruits of goodness spring from seeds of kindness sown by those who love peace.

Selfishness

4 Where do you suppose arguments and fights among you come from? Don't they start from selfishness? You want certain things and can't have them. You want your own way and can't get it. So you argue and fight with such anger that you could kill to get what you want. Have you ever thought about talking to God about it?

3-4. But God won't give you everything you ask for because you want it for selfish reasons. Don't you know that loving the things and pleasures of this world is like hating God? He who befriends the world makes himself an enemy of God.

5-6. What do you think the Scripture means when it says, "God gave us the Holy Spirit because He longs for us to be faithful and good"? It also says, "God gives grace to those who are teachable, but not to those who are proud."

Humility

7-8. Give yourselves fully to God. Resist the devil. If you take a stand against him he will turn and run from you. Come close to God and He'll come close to you. Stop doing wicked things. Purify your thoughts. You can't love God and this world at the same time.

9-10. Be sorry for your sins. It's good to shed some tears over what you've done. But just being sorry is not enough. You also need to change your ways. Humble yourself before the Lord and ask Him to help you, and He will lift you up.

11-12. Stop saying bad things about

other church members. Don't judge them. Judging is God's job, not yours. Your job is to obey and do what's right. There's only one Judge who has a right to enforce the law. He rewards those who keep it and punishes those who willfully break it. So don't think you have a right to go around judging people.

Pride

13-14. Now listen. Some of you say to yourselves, "One of these days we're going to some other city and do business. By the end of the year we should make a good profit." How do you know you'll live that long? Life is like a mist. It's here for just a little while, and then it disappears.

15-16. You should say something like this: "If it's the Lord's will, we plan to do these things." But you're so proud of what you've done and so sure of yourselves that you're always bragging. That's wrong.

17. The person who knows what's right and doesn't do it is sinning. Life is uncertain, so it's good to do what's right.

Wages

5 Let me say a word to the rich. The time is coming when you will weep and groan because your money and properties are worthless. The things you hoarded will rot, and your expensive clothes will be eaten by moths.

3. Your gold and silver will tarnish, and your coins will rust and witness against you. Your greed will be the cause of your destruction in the fires of the last days.

4. You haven't given an honest wage to those who have worked for you. They have cried out to God for help, and the Lord has heard their cries

5-6. You have lived for riches and

pleasure. You've condemned and sentenced to death innocent people just to get them out of the way. And no one dared to stand up against you. Your hearts are fat with pride like an animal ready for slaughter.

Patience and Hope

7-8. So be patient, my fellow believers. The Lord is coming. Be like the farmer who sows the seed, prays for rain, and then waits for the harvest. You need to be patient. Take courage, and don't give up hope in the coming of Jesus.

9. Don't complain about each other, or you'll be judged guilty. One day the Judge will come and set things right.

10-11. Look at the prophets who spoke for the Lord. They suffered many things, but were patient. Job is one such example. He lost everything he had. But he remained faithful to God. Look what the Lord did for him after his faith was tested.

12. Above all else, be honest. Don't take an oath every time you want to let people know that you're telling the truth. Just let your yes be yes and your no be no. Keep your word, and people will believe you.

Prayer

13. Have bad things happened to you? Tell Jesus about it. Are you happy? Sing praises to the Lord.

14-15. Are you sick? Call the elders of the church and ask them to pray for you. They'll anoint you with oil and ask the Lord to heal you. If the Lord thinks best, He'll do it. If you confess your sins, they will be forgiven. This will help you get well.

16. So admit your faults to one another, but confess your sins to God alone. Pray for each other. If it's God's will, the sick among you will be healed. The prayer of a good person can do a lot.

17-18. Elijah was just an ordinary man as we are. He prayed for God to hold back the rain. And God did. It didn't rain for three and a half years. After the people gave their hearts to God, Elijah prayed again. The rains came, and the crops grew.

Helping Others

19-20. My dear fellow believers, if one of you wanders from the truth, you need to bring that person back to God and help him live a Christian life. You have saved that person from eternal death. His many sins will be forgiven and no one will ever be told what they were.

1 Peter

INTRODUCTION: *This letter was written by Peter from Rome about A.D. 62. He encouraged Christians not to let go of their precious faith in spite of troubles and suffering. He reminded them that Jesus is the Rock on which their faith is built, and that they are God's special people. From this book we learn that we should be good citizens, love each other, and obey God, no matter what.*

An Apostle

1 From Peter, an apostle of Jesus, to God's chosen people scattered in countries around the Mediterranean Sea. You have been born again by the power of the Holy Spirit. God has a wonderful future in mind for you. He has made you clean through the blood of Jesus. And through the Holy Spirit He is helping you to obey. Grace and peace to all of you.

Hope

3-4. We thank our heavenly Father for His great love and mercy. He has given us a new birth. Through the resurrection of Jesus we have a lasting hope. God has promised you a place in heaven that will never be taken away from you.

5-6. He will watch over you and guide you until Jesus comes. So keep your minds focused on this hope. You can still be happy even though you're going through many troubles right now.

7. Troubles test faith to see how strong it is. And after it's been tested and purified, it's even stronger, and worth more than gold. Faith will never lose its value. It brings honor and glory to Jesus. He'll reward you for it when He comes back.

8-9. I know you love Jesus. Even though you've never seen Him, you're thrilled over what He has done for you. And because of your faith you will be saved forever.

10-11. The ancient prophets wrote about it. They tried to understand it and even studied what the other prophets had written. The Holy Spirit told them of a Savior who would suffer and die so that people could be saved. They wanted to know when He would come and the glory that would follow.

12. They knew that these prophecies were given not for their time but for our time, to those of us who know Jesus. This was the good news we preached to you by the power of the Holy Spirit given to us at Pentecost. Even the angels would like to know more about these truths.

A Holy Life

13-14. So exercise self-control. Stay alert and be ready for action. Place your hope in what Jesus did for you, and what He will do for you when He returns to take you to heaven. Now that you are children of God and obey Him, don't turn back to the old ways before you knew better.

15-16. God is holy and good, and has

called you to be like Him. The Bible tells us, "You should be holy because I am holy."

17-19. When you pray to your Father, remember that He judges everyone fairly. So as a traveler on your way to heaven, live with respect for Him. God paid an awesome price for your freedom from sin. It was not with silver or gold, but by the precious blood of Jesus. He was sacrificed as a prized lamb without flaw or blemish.

20-21. This plan was made in heaven long before this world was created. Now after many centuries we have had the privilege of seeing it happen. And because Jesus was raised from the dead and taken to heaven, God can do that for you, too.

Born Again

22-23. Now that you have accepted Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit has changed your lives, be sure to love each other. You have been born again, not by some power inside of you, but by the living word of God.

24-25. As the Scripture says: "People are like the flowers of the field that bloom and die. But the Word of God lasts forever." This is the gospel that was preached to you.

The Living Stone

2 So get rid of all bad behavior. Stop lying, being jealous, and speaking evil of others. As newborn babies need milk, you need to drink from the word of God so you can grow even stronger. You've already tasted His word and know how good the Lord is.

4. The builders of Solomon's Temple said a certain huge rock was useless. But later they found that it was the very one they needed for the Temple's foundation stone. Jesus is like that, a

living stone on whom to build. People didn't want Him, but He was chosen by God who sent Him.

5-6. And you are the living stones that God is using to build His spiritual temple. You're also working as priests, working in God's temple offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus. As the Scripture says, "I am laying a precious foundation stone. Whoever builds on this stone will never be disappointed."

7-8. This stone is of great value. The Scripture says, "The stone that the builders said was useless was the only one that could hold the weight of the Temple." It also says, "Those who don't believe will stumble over it and fall." It's because they don't want to obey what God says.

A Special People

9-10. But you are a special people, a holy nation. You are the King's priests. He wants you to tell others how He brought you out of darkness into His wonderful light. At one time you were not part of God's people, but now you are. Once you didn't know God's love and mercy, but now you do.

Be Good Citizens

11-12. Dear friends, remember that you're like visitors in this world. So don't be selfish and end up losing your soul. Live good lives and do what you can to help others. As your neighbors see this they will give their hearts to God. And when Jesus comes, they will go to heaven with you.

13-15. Be good citizens for Jesus' sake. Laws are given to keep order in the country. Those who do wrong are punished, but those who do right are praised. God wants you to be good because it will also silence the false rumors about you.

16-17. Act as free men. But don't use your freedom in Jesus to break the law. You are His servants. Respect others. Love your brothers and sisters in the church. In all you do, honor God. Also respect those in charge of the government.

Follow Jesus

18-19. Some of you have been brought as slaves from other countries to work for the Romans. Respect your masters and do what they say, even if they are unreasonable. It brings dignity and honor to a man when he suffers unjustly and refuses to retaliate.

20. What credit is it to you if you're punished for doing wrong? But when you patiently suffer for doing right, that's when God can show His power through you.

21. In one way or another, we all have been called to give this kind of witness. And Jesus has given us an example to follow.

22-24. Jesus never retaliated. When they insulted Him, He said nothing. When they beat Him, He didn't threaten to get even with them. He committed His life into the hands of His heavenly Father. He let them crucify Him to pay for our sins so that we might live for Him. By His wounds we have been healed.

25. Before you knew Him, you were like lost sheep. But now you're in the Shepherd's fold. He's your Protector and will guard your soul.

Husbands and Wives

3 This same principle applies to wives. Honor your husbands. If your husband is not a Christian, the way you live might influence him. When he sees your kindness and respect for God, he will be won to Christ without you saying a word.

3-4. A woman's beauty is not on the outside. It's not in the way she fixes her hair or in the makeup, jewelry, or clothes she wears. Real beauty comes from within. It's the charm of a gentle and tender spirit, which in God's sight is priceless.

5-6. This is the kind of beauty that the women of old had. While they put God first in their lives, they accepted the leadership of their husbands. Sarah looked up to Abraham because she knew he loved God. Women like that are Sarah's daughters.

7. This same principle holds true for men. Husbands, love your wives, and be thoughtful and kind to them. Respect them as your gentler partners and coheirs of the life to come. If you don't respect your wife, how can you expect God to answer your prayers?

8-9. This principle applies to all church members. Work together in harmony. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be kind and considerate of each other. Don't try to get even with someone who has wronged you. Instead, pray for that person. Try to be a blessing, and God will bless you for it.

Right and Wrong

10-12. The Scripture says, "If a person wants to be truly happy, he should be honest and watch his tongue. He should turn from doing evil to others and be a blessing to them. Try to be at peace with everyone. The Lord watches over His people and answers their prayers. But He will not help those who do evil."

13-14. Who's going to stop you from doing good? Even if you do have to suffer for doing good, in God's sight you're blessed. So don't be afraid to do what's right.

15-16. Give Jesus the most honored place in your life. Then when people

ask you about the hope you have, you may tell them. But do it kindly. Then those who have misunderstood your faith and said bad things about you will be ashamed.

17. God may not always stop you from being hurt. But it's always better to suffer for being good than for being bad.

18-19. Look at Jesus. He was innocent. Yet to bring us back to God, He had to die for our sins. They crucified Him, but He rose from the dead. Everything He did was through the power of the Holy Spirit. And it was through the Holy Spirit that He worked on the hearts of people who lived before us.

20. In the days of Noah people were offered a chance to be saved from the flood. But they kept right on living in sin. The Lord waited patiently 120 years for them to change while Noah built the ark. But only eight people were saved. In one sense those eight were baptized by the flood, and their lives were spared.

21. This is what happened to you when you were baptized. You went through the baptismal waters dirty and came out clean. I'm not talking about dirt; I'm talking about the promise you made to God from a clean heart to live for Him.

22. Now He is in heaven sitting next to God, where the angels and other powerful beings throughout the universe willingly serve Him.

Serve the Lord

4 Because Jesus suffered for us, you may have to suffer too. So prepare yourselves by having the same attitude that He had. If you're willing to suffer for Jesus, this shows that you've truly turned your back on sin. You're no longer controlled by selfishness, but are eager to do God's will.

3-4. You've spent enough time in the past doing all the bad things unbelievers do. People who knew you then are surprised at the change. They can't believe how you keep refusing to join them in their wild parties and reckless lives. Now they say evil things about you just because you love Jesus.

5-6. One day they'll have to give an account to God for what they've done. This is the reason the gospel was preached to you and to others who have already died. Men set themselves up as judges, condemn you, and even put you to death. But God is our final judge, and He will give us eternal life.

7-9. Considering the times in which we live, the end might come to any of us sooner than we think. Discipline yourselves. This will help you to pray better. Above all else, love each other. Love has a way of not focusing on mistakes and sins. Continue to open your homes to those in need, and do so cheerfully.

10-11. God has given each of you spiritual gifts to help each other. Those who preach should do so with conviction. Those who serve should do so with the strength God has given them. These things should be done to honor God. All glory and power belong to Him both now and forever. Amen.

Suffering for Him

12-13. My dear friends, don't think it strange when you have to suffer for Jesus. Be glad that He was willing to suffer for you. When He comes back, you'll be overjoyed to see Him, and will be given a share in His glory.

14. If people insult you because of Jesus, be happy. They may curse you, but the Holy Spirit is with you, and you are blessed.

15-16. Being punished for being a thief, murderer, an evildoer, or for

causing trouble is not what I'm talking about. But if you suffer because you're a Christian, don't feel ashamed. Be glad that you bear His name.

17-18. When the time of judgment comes, and it begins with the people of God, what will happen to those who have turned against the gospel? As the Scripture says: "If good people who are saved, have to suffer what will happen to sinners?"

19. We may not understand why some are suffering for their faith. But remember that God is letting it happen for a reason. When we look at Calvary, we know that God loves us and that we can trust Him. So commit your lives to Him and continue to do what's right and good.

Feed the Sheep

5 Now let me say a word to church elders, of whom I am one. What I'm telling you about the sufferings of Jesus I saw with my own eyes. I know I will have a share with you in His glory when he returns.

2. So be the kind of shepherd you ought to be. Feed God's flock spiritually and watch over them, not because you're getting paid, but because you want them to be in heaven.

3-4. Don't lord it over people, but be an example to them. And when the Chief Shepherd comes back, He'll give you a crown that will never lose its brightness.

Stand Firm

5-6. Those of you who are young should respect the older members. Be humble and ready to do whatever needs to be done. The Scripture says, "God can't do much with proud people, but He gives grace to the humble." So humble yourselves, knowing how much stronger God is, and in His own time He will lift you up.

7-9. Leave all your worries with Him, for He cares about you. Stay alert and be careful, because the devil is roaming around like a hungry lion ready to destroy anyone he can. Stand firm in the faith and refuse to give in to him. Remember that believers everywhere are going through the same things you are.

10-11. Your suffering is only temporary. The God who promised you a share in His glory will heal your hurts and help you to stand firm. To Him be power and glory both now and forever. Amen.

Final Greetings

12. I wrote this short letter to you with the help of Silas, our faithful brother in Christ. My purpose was to encourage you, and tell you that the message of God's grace is true. So stand fast in that grace.

13-14. The church here in Rome, also loved by the Lord, sends you greetings. So does Mark, who is like a son to me. Give everyone a brotherly hug. Peace be with all of you who love Jesus.

2 Peter

INTRODUCTION: *This is the second book that Peter wrote. It was written from Rome around A.D. 67, shortly before he was killed for his faith. He reminded Christians that everything he had told them about Jesus is true. He warned them against listening to false teachers, who don't really believe that Jesus is coming again. But Jesus will come back. He will destroy this world and will create new heavens and a new earth.*

A Servant of Jesus

1 From Peter, a servant of Jesus, to you who have the same precious faith we have. The good news is what God has done for us through His Son, our Savior. Grace and peace be yours as you grow to be more and more like Jesus.

3-4. Jesus has given us all we need to live a Christian life. Because He is good, He has given us many precious promises. These promises give us power to live above sin and the bad things in the world.

Live for Jesus

5-7. So add to your faith goodness, and to goodness a deeper knowledge of God. To this knowledge, add self-control and perseverance. After that, add kindness, and to kindness, add love for everyone.

8-9. If these things become part of your life and overflow to others, you'll always be effective for Jesus. Your love for Him will never stop growing. But those who don't add these things to their lives are short-sighted. They have forgotten that Jesus has forgiven them and given them power to overcome sin.

10-11. Therefore, my friends, respond to God's love by taking hold of

His plan for you, helping to make it secure. If you do these things, you'll never fail. And when Jesus comes, you'll receive a royal welcome into His kingdom.

Peter's Ministry Ends

12-13. I intend to keep reminding you of these things so that you won't forget them. I feel that it's what I ought to do while I'm able.

14-15. I don't have much longer to live. I'm sure I'll soon be arrested and crucified, as Jesus told me I would be. So I want to put my thoughts in writing. Then after I'm gone you'll remember what I said.

God's Word

16. The things we told you before were not made-up stories about the power and glory of the coming of Jesus. We saw His majesty with our own eyes when we were with Him on the mountain.

17. He was surrounded by the power and glory He had before coming to earth. The Father Himself spoke from the cloud that covered us, saying, "This is My beloved Son. I am very pleased with Him."

18. We actually heard God's voice speaking to us from heaven! It hap-

pened right before our very eyes there on the mountain.

19. But you have something even more sure than that—the prophecies about Jesus. So pay attention to them. They're like a lamp that keeps shining in a dark place, until the day dawns when Christ breaks through the clouds like the Morning Star, and fills our hearts with joy.

20-21. It's important for you to understand that prophecies are not a prophet's own ideas. Nor are they just a record of what he believed and wanted to say. Men of God were moved by the Holy Spirit to speak and write what He revealed to them.

False Prophets

2 There were also false prophets in the past. And there will be some among you too. They quietly slip in false doctrines that deny that Jesus had to die for their sins. They're hurting not only you but also themselves. Many believe what these false teachers have to say, and as a result they become confused. Soon they end up cursing the truth and missing out on heaven.

3. All that these teachers seem to want is your money. They even make up stories to get you to support them. God knows what they're doing, and they will reap what they have sown.

Judgment on Wickedness

4-5. If angels who sinned were put out of heaven, it's only a matter of time before false teachers will also be punished. Look at what happened at the time of the flood. God punished those godless people, but saved Noah and his family.

6-8. Don't forget Sodom and Gomorrah. The people there were so bad that nothing could change them. The

destruction of their cities is an example of what will happen to the wicked. But God saved Lot, who was really troubled over the filthy lives and wickedness he saw around him day after day.

9-10. From this you can see that the Lord knows how to save those who serve Him. But it will be a terrible day for those who do as they please without respect for God. These false teachers are so arrogant they even say bad things about angels.

11. Consider the angels. They're much more powerful and intelligent than these false prophets and teachers. Yet they never speak disrespectfully of anyone.

12. These people seem to live by instinct, like wild animals. They insult, others, and laugh at a faith they know little about. Like vicious animals out of control, they will have to be destroyed.

13. They will suffer the consequences of all the hurt they have caused. They do evil things openly and think nothing about it. They're even deceitful while eating with you.

14. They're always thinking of more ways to sin. And they tempt those who are weak in the faith to join them. They pride themselves on their skill to get what they want without thinking about the judgment of God.

15-16. These men are like Balaam, the false prophet, who was so self-centered that God had to use a donkey to get his attention and rebuke him. Balaam even talked back to the donkey! Finally God let him see an angel standing on the road with a sword in his hand, and that stopped his craziness.

False Teachers

17-18. False teachers are like dry wells, like clouds without rain blown

away by the wind. They talk about how great they are. They try to get others, especially new members, to believe what they say.

19-20. They talk about the freedom they have in Jesus that lets them do anything without feeling guilty. But they're not really free. They're slaves to sin and to their own desires. If people have been set free by Jesus from the power of sin and then go back to a life of sin, they're worse off than before.

21-22. In one way, it would have been better if they had not accepted Jesus as their Savior. It's like the saying that people have: "After a pig is washed, it goes back and rolls in the mud."

Jesus' Return

3 My dear friends, this is the second letter I've written to you. Both times I've tried to remind you of several things. Remember what the prophets told us. And don't forget the instructions given to you by the Lord through His apostles.

3-4. In the last days people will make fun of prophecies, especially of Jesus' second coming. They'll say, "We've heard about His coming for years. Even the old people talked about it when they were alive. But He still hasn't come. Things will continue as they always have since the world was made."

5-6. But they ignore the fact that God created the heavens and the earth long ago. Then He covered the earth with water and made land appear. In the time of Noah He used water to destroy what He had made.

7. It proves that God can do with this planet whatever He wants to. Right now He's keeping things going until the day of judgment. That's when the earth will be destroyed by fire and the wicked will perish and be no more.

8. Because time has lasted this long doesn't mean that God has changed His mind about things. With God time means nothing. A thousand years for us is like a day to Him.

9. This doesn't mean that the Lord is slow in keeping His promise. He has let things go on because He's so patient. He loves everyone and wants them to turn from their sins and be saved.

10. The coming of Jesus will surprise us like a thief quietly sneaking up on us at night. The sky will disappear with a loud noise. Fire will cover the whole world and everything made by man will be burned up.

11-13. This will happen so when people least expect it. So what kind of people should you be? You should live to please God. You should do everything you can to speed His coming. In that day, even the heavens will be on fire. But God has promised us a new heaven and a new earth, which will be our home forever.

Don't Be Deceived

14. My dear friends, as you look forward to your new home in heaven, make every effort to live pure and blameless lives. Have nothing to hide, and be at peace with God.

15. Jesus' delay shows His great patience and love. He doesn't want anyone to be lost, but that everyone should repent and be saved. Paul, according to the wisdom given him, says the same thing.

16. In all his letters he emphasizes the importance of living blameless lives and being ready for Jesus' coming. Some things he said are not easy to understand, and those who are spiritually unstable twist what he said. But they do the same thing with the rest of the Scriptures.

A Final Word

17. Therefore, my dear friends, since you already know all this, I don't need to say any more. Just be careful so you won't be fooled by those who misapply the Scriptures. You

don't want to lose your faith in God. 18. Continue to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus, our Savior and Lord. To Him be all honor and glory both now and forever. Amen.

1 John

INTRODUCTION: *The apostle John wrote this book about A.D. 90. By then John was very old. In this book he reminded Christians of some very important things: if we confess our sins, God forgives us; we show our love for God when we obey Him; Jesus was fully human and died to take away our sins; test what you hear by the Bible; and don't forget to love each other.*

The Word of Life

1 The One who existed from the very beginning is called the Word. We have seen Him and heard Him. We have looked at Him and touched Him. He is the one who gives life. I want to tell you about Him. He has always been with the Father, and then He came here to be with us.

3-4. We want to share with you what we've seen and heard so you can enjoy these same blessings with us. Together we can have fellowship with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing this to you so that you can have the same joy we have and feel complete in Jesus.

Light and Darkness

5-6. The message we received from Jesus, which we are sharing with you, is that God is light. Sin, like darkness, can't exist in His presence. Now, if we say we have fellowship with God, but walk in the darkness of sin, we're not telling the truth. We're lying.

7. But if we walk in the light of God, as Jesus did, then we'll have fellowship with each other, and Jesus will cleanse us from all sin.

8-10. Now, if we say that we have no sin, we're not telling the truth. But if

we confess our sins, Jesus will forgive us and make our hearts clean. If we say we have not sinned, we're saying that God is a liar, and that the Scriptures are not true.

The Test

2 Dear children, I'm sharing these things with you so that you won't keep on living in sin. If you do sin, Jesus stands in the presence of God to speak in our behalf. His death on the cross covers all our sins. It covers the sins of anyone in the world who accepts Him as their Savior.

3-4. The way to know if you know God is by your eagerness to keep His commandments. Anyone who says he knows God but doesn't do what God says is a liar.

5-6. But he who lives according to God's law will find God's love growing in his heart. This is the way we know that we know Him. If anyone says that God is in his heart, he ought to live as Jesus lived.

7-8. I'm not writing to you about a new commandment. I'm just reminding you of the commandment we had from the beginning. Yet in a way it is a new one, because we can now see it in the life of Jesus. He put love and obedience in a new light,

which helps people understand God's law better.

9-11. If anyone says he's walking in the light but hates his brother, he's still walking in darkness. On the other hand, if he loves his brother, he's walking in the light. And there will be nothing in his life to cause his brother to stumble. The one who hates his brother doesn't realize what he's doing, because he's in the dark.

Compliments

12. I'm writing to you, dear children, to tell you that your sins are forgiven because of Jesus.

13. Dear fathers, I'm proud of you because you have Jesus in your hearts. Young men, I'm proud of you, too, because you have overcome the evil one. Little children, I'm also proud of you, because you know that your heavenly Father loves you.

14. And I want to compliment you fathers, because you still have Jesus in your hearts. I want to compliment you young men because you're still strong in the Lord, and the word of God is still in your hearts. That's why you continue to overcome the evil one.

Deceptions

15-16. Don't love the things of this world more than Jesus. If you do, the love of God is not in your hearts. Wanting to do things that are bad, reading about sin or watching it, or being proud of things we have do not come from our Father in heaven. They come from what the world does.

17. This world will one day pass away and be no more, but those who do the will of God will live forever.

18-19. We told you that in the last days Satan will work harder than ever against Jesus. Many enemies of Christ

are already circulating false teachings. These lies about Jesus are even being spread by some who were once with us. But they were not really one of us, or they never would have left.

20-21. You are still with us, because you're guided by the Holy Spirit and know what is true. I'm telling you all this because I want you to know what's happening. You know the truth, so hold on to it.

22-23. The lie that's being circulated about Jesus is that He's not really the Son of God and Savior of the world. Those who say this are enemies of Christ and reject the truth about the Father as well. Whoever accepts the truth that Jesus is the Son of God accepts the truth about God too.

24-25. So hold on to what we've told you about Jesus. If you keep this truth in your hearts, you will have fellowship with the Father and His Son. And Jesus will give us eternal life, just as He promised.

26-27. I'm pointing this out to you because those who are teaching things that aren't true will try to rob you of your faith. You have the Holy Spirit in your hearts, so you know what's true and what isn't. The Holy Spirit doesn't mix truth and error. So be faithful to what He has taught you.

28-29. My dear friends, stay close to Jesus so that with confidence and joy you may look forward to His coming. You know in your hearts that Jesus is righteous and that all who do what's right are the children of God.

Children of God

3 Look at how much the Father loves us! He even calls us His sons and daughters. That's why people in the world don't accept us—because they haven't accepted Him.

2-3. Dear friends, while we're children

of God, we don't know what we'll look like when Jesus comes. But we know that we'll look like Him. And we'll see Him as He really is. So everyone who has this hope will keep his heart pure, and live like Jesus.

Sin

4-6. Everyone who breaks God's law is sinning. That's what sin is. Jesus came to die for our sins. He had no sin of His own. Anyone who has Jesus in his heart doesn't keep on living in sin. Those who do don't really know Jesus. **7-9.** My dear children, don't let anyone fool you. Those who do what's right are considered righteous. But those who keep living in sin are being influenced by the devil. He first sinned in heaven, and he keeps right on sinning. But Jesus has broken his power. So those who are born again by the Holy Spirit will not continue in sin. They are God's children.

Love

10-11. There's a difference between the children of God and those who follow the devil. Those who don't do what's right, or don't love their brothers and sisters in Jesus, don't really belong to God. The message you heard before is still the same. We need to love each other.

12-13. Let's not be like Cain, who listened to the devil and ended up killing his brother. Why did he do that? Because his brother Abel did what was right, and Cain disobeyed. So don't be surprised if those who don't know God hate you because you're good.

14-15. One way to know that you have left death behind and have life in Jesus is by the love you have for others. Anyone who hates his brother in Christ is committing murder in his

heart. And we know that no murderer can be given eternal life.

16-18. We know how much God loves us, because Jesus came and died for us. So we ought to be willing to die for our brothers and sisters in Jesus. When you see a fellow believer in need and don't help him, how can you say you love God? To love someone doesn't mean just saying so; it means doing something to help them.

19-21. We know we belong to those who have the truth about God when our hearts are at peace in His presence. But if our conscience bothers us, let's listen to God. He knows everything. But let's have confidence in God's love for us and not keep condemning ourselves.

22-23. We can ask God for whatever we need to do His will, and He'll help us. It's because we love Him and do those things that please Him. He said to believe in Jesus and love one another.

24. Those who keep God's commandments live in God's love, and God lives in them. How do we know that? Because the Holy Spirit lives in us.

Testing Things

4 Dearly loved friends, don't believe everything you hear. Test what others tell you by the word of God. The world is full of false prophets and false teachers.

2-3. One way to know if a person's message is from the Holy Spirit is to ask him if he believes that the divine Son of God became a man. If he doesn't, he is not speaking for God. Such people are against Christ, no matter what they say. You knew this would happen, and it's already happening.

4-5. But you belong to God, and you've overcome the temptation to listen to false prophets and teachers. This is because Jesus is in your

hearts, and He's stronger than the devil, who tries to control the world. These false prophets and teachers think the way the world does, and the world listens to them.

6. But we belong to God and are guided by what He says. Those who love God will listen to what we're saying, and those who refuse don't really love Jesus. This is how you can tell the difference between those who are guided by the Holy Spirit and those who are not.

God Is Love

7. Dear friends, let's love one another. Love is from God. Those who are loving and kind know God. They have been born again into God's family.

8-9. Anyone who doesn't love others doesn't know God, because God is love. We know this because God sent His Son to this world to die for us, so we could have eternal life.

10-11. It's by looking to the cross that we know what love is really like. It was God's love for us that made Him send His Son to come and die for our sins. And if God so loved us, we ought to love each other.

12-14. No one has ever seen God, but if we love each other, God lives in us. And we know this because the Holy Spirit put God's love in our hearts. Besides that, we have personally seen the Son of God, whom the Father sent to be the Savior of the world.

15-16. Anyone who believes and says that Jesus is the Son of God, and shows his love for others, knows God. We know how much God loves us. Those who live out this love have God in their hearts.

17-18. We know that our love for God is growing stronger when we are not afraid of the day of judgment. Fear and love don't go together. Those

who are afraid of God really don't know Him.

19-21. We love God because He first loved us. If someone says he loves God and hates others, he's a liar. If he can't love those he sees, how can he possibly love God, whom he has not seen? Jesus told us to love God and each other.

Faith

5 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Son of God has been born again. And those who love God will love His children.

2-3. We know that we love God, when we love those who belong to Him and keep His commandments. If we love God and others, keeping His commandments isn't hard.

4-5. Everyone born again by the Holy Spirit can overcome the spirit of the world. Our faith in Jesus is what gives us victory over the world. Who can overcome the world? Anyone who believes in Jesus and asks Him for help.

Three Witnesses

6. Jesus' coming as the Messiah was seen at His baptism and crucifixion. It was proven, not by His baptism, but by the shedding of His blood. The Holy Spirit says that this is true, and He doesn't lie.

7-8. In heaven there are three witnesses to this: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three work together as one. There are also three events on earth that witness for Jesus: His baptism, His death on Calvary, and His sending the Holy Spirit.

9. In a court of law, we accept the witness of people. Then why don't we accept what God says about His Son? What He says is so much more reliable than what people say.

10. Those who believe what God said

about His Son also have a witness in themselves. They know they've been born again, and their hearts have been changed. Those who don't believe what God said about His Son make God a liar. They refuse the evidence God has given them.

11-12. God has promised eternal life through His Son. Anyone who believes, and has Jesus in his heart, has eternal life. But anyone who does not believe in Jesus does not have life.

13. You believe in Jesus. So I'm writing to assure you that you already have eternal life. Just keep holding on to Jesus.

Prayer

14-15. We know that God will listen to our prayers and give us whatever we ask, if it's in harmony with His will. And if we know that He listens to us, we also know He will give us what's best for us.

16. If you see a Christian sinning out

of ignorance, pray for him. If he repents, God will forgive him. But you can't ask God to forgive him and give him eternal life if he is not sorry and stubbornly goes on sinning.

17. All sinning is bad, but all sins are not the same. God takes into consideration what a person knows and doesn't know.

A Final Word

18-19. We know that those who are born of God don't deliberately keep on sinning. Jesus claims them as His own and keeps them safe from the evil one. So we know that we are God's children and that the world around us is under the power of the evil one.

20. We also know that Jesus came to help us understand God and how to have fellowship with Him. There is only one true God who gives eternal life.

21. Dear children, don't let anything ever take the place of Jesus.

2 John

INTRODUCTION: *John wrote this letter to a Christian lady about A.D. 90. He told her how much everyone loved her, and how happy he was to know that her children were in the faith. Then John warned her not to be fooled by false teachings about Jesus, but to hold on to her faith.*

To a Lady Believer

1. From John, the elder, to a dear Christian lady and her children, whom I love in the truth. All who know God's truth feel the same way.

2-3. The truth about Jesus will be with us forever. May the grace, mercy, and peace that comes from our Father through His Son be with you always.

4. I was happy to hear that your children are walking in God's truth and living as our heavenly Father wants them to.

5-6. Dear lady, I'm not going to tell you something new when I say that Christians should love each other. We have known this all along. Love is expressed in living by God's commandments.

Truth and Error

7-8. Some are saying that Jesus was not a real human being. People who say this have the spirit of antichrist.

So be careful that you don't lose the truth for which you have sacrificed so much. You will surely receive your reward when Jesus returns.

9. We must follow the teachings of Christ. Those who don't are not sent by God. But those who do have a relationship with both the Father and the Son.

10-11. If someone who doesn't teach the truth comes to you, don't invite him to your house. If you do, people will think that you agree with what he's teaching.

Farewell

12. There are other things I would like to warn you about, but I'd rather not put them in writing. I hope to come there for a visit. Then we can talk about these things some more, and rejoice in each other's faith.

13. The children of your chosen sister in Christ send their greetings.

3 John

INTRODUCTION: *This letter was written by John to his friend Gaius about A.D. 90. He loved him as a brother in the faith and wished him good health. He thanked him for what he was doing for the missionaries who came by. Then John warned him against those who said bad things about others in the church.*

A Generous Brother

1. From John, the elder, to Gaius, whom I love as a brother.

2. My dear friend, I pray that all is well with you. I trust that you are as healthy and strong as your faith is.

3-4. Some of the members there stopped by to see me. I was very happy when they told me how much you love God and His truth. Nothing makes me happier than to hear that my own spiritual children are still following the truth about Jesus.

5-6. My dear brother, you're so faithful in all you do—in helping not only fellow believers but even strangers. The church members we sent to you have written me about your kind hospitality. Please give them what they need to continue their trip.

7-8. These brothers are preaching the gospel and accept nothing from unbelievers lest people think they're doing it to make money. So as fellow believers we need to do what we can to help them. Then we become partners with them in spreading the good news.

False Rumors

9. I have written a letter to the

church. But one of the leaders, who always wants the final word, doesn't listen to what I say.

10. When I come, I will correct the false rumors that he's been spreading about us. He refuses to help the traveling workers I send. And when other members do, he puts them out of the church.

11. Dear friend, do what's right, no matter what others do. Anyone who does what's good belongs to God. But he who doesn't, doesn't know God. It's that simple.

12. In the meantime, I'm sending Demetrius to you. He has a good reputation wherever he goes. Believers appreciate his stand for the truth. So do I. What I'm telling you about him is true.

Farewell

13-14. There are many other things I'd like to tell you, but I'd rather not put them in writing. Anyway, I hope to see you soon. Then we can talk about them. Peace to you. The friends here send their greetings. Please greet our friends there.

Jude

INTRODUCTION: *This short letter was written by Jude, one of the brothers of Jesus. It was written between A.D. 65 and 80. He told the believers that God loved them. Then he warned them about ungodly teachers and members whom Jesus will destroy when He comes back with all His angels.*

Defend the Faith

1. From Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, to those who are loved by God, kept by Jesus, and called by the Holy Spirit.

2. May God's mercy, peace, and love be yours in full.

3. Dear believers, I'm writing to you to make clear some things about our faith. I urge you to defend what you believe against those who are challenging it.

4. Some men with questionable reputations have slipped into our group and are causing trouble. You need to be aware of them. They like to change the love and grace of God into total freedom to do whatever they want. They have turned against Jesus and no longer accept Him as Savior and Lord.

The Judgment

5. I want to remind you of some things you already know. Remember that Christ led the children of Israel out of Egypt. But later He destroyed those who refused to believe what He said.

6. Going back further in time, when some of the angels in heaven rebelled, He had to expel them. He has confined them to this world. When the day of judgment comes, He'll have to destroy them.

7. Look at Sodom and Gomorrah. Those cities were so wicked that God had to destroy them by fire. While they are no longer burning, the results will last forever. That's what will happen to all who are rebellious and determined to live their own way.

8. False teachers such as that have joined your church. Yet they keep on living filthy lives. They reject any kind of authority, and are quick to accuse those in leadership of being poor Christians.

9. In contrast to these arrogant men is Jesus, also called Michael, because He's in charge of all the angels. When Satan challenged Him about raising Moses from the dead, He didn't attack him with words, but simply said, "May God rebuke you."

10. But these false teachers sneer at anything they don't like, and criticize what they don't understand. They act like animals, living only by instinct. They're destroying themselves, but don't know it.

11. Woe to them! They have the same spirit that Cain had when he killed his brother Abel. And the same attitude that Balaam, the false prophet who loved money more than God, had. They have the same spirit that

leadership of Moses and Aaron. People like that will be destroyed, just as Korah and his followers were.

A Prophecy

12. These men come to your fellowship dinners as if there were nothing wrong. They're like clouds that promise rain, but are empty and blow away with the wind. They're like fruitless trees at harvesttime, dried up and dead.

13. They're like foaming waves that bring scum onto the beach. They're like meteors that streak across the sky, then lose their light and disappear.

14-15. Enoch, the seventh in line from Adam, told us what would happen to such people. He said, "I was shown in vision that the Lord will come back with thousands and thousands of angels. He will come to carry out judgment on the wicked. They will be condemned for their pride, arrogance, immorality, and for what they have said against Him."

16. These false teachers are constantly complaining, grumbling, and finding fault with everyone. They brag about themselves and flatter people to get what they want.

The Last Days

17-19. Dear friends, remember what the apostles of Jesus told us? They said, "In the last days scoffers will come following their own ideas and doing what they want." These people will cause divisions in the church. They're guided not by the Holy Spirit, but by the spirit of the world.

20-21. So keep building your faith, asking the Holy Spirit to help you. Hold on to the love of God as you look forward to the return of Jesus, who will give you eternal life.

22-23. Be kind and compassionate toward those members who are weak in the faith. Do what you can to help save the lost, as if they were trapped in a fire. Be merciful and kind to them. But continue to hate sin as much as you do filthy, stinking clothes.

Assurance

24-25. Jesus is able to keep you from falling. And He will present you faultless to the Father before the whole universe with great joy. To such a wise Savior and God be glory, majesty, dominion, and power, both now and forever. Amen.

Revelation

INTRODUCTION: *This is a very important book. It was written by the apostle John about A.D. 96, after he was arrested and exiled to a small island near Greece. While he was on the island, Jesus appeared to him and showed him in vision all the things that will happen before He comes back. John saw the spiritual problems of churches, the spiritual war between Christ and Satan, the loyalty of God's people, and the coming of Jesus. Then John saw Satan and the wicked destroyed, and new heavens and a new earth, where the righteous will live forever.*

A Message From Jesus

1 This book is about what Jesus is doing. God told Him to tell us what is soon to happen. So Jesus sent His angel, Gabriel, to show John those things. John was told to write down what he saw and heard. Those who read this book and do what it says will be happy.

4-5. Greetings from me, John, to the seven churches. I have a message for you from Jesus. Grace and peace to you from God, our Father, who loves us and will one day come to take us home. Grace and peace from the Holy Spirit, whose throne is next to God. And grace and peace from Jesus, who loves us, died for our sins, and rose from the dead. He is above all the kings of the earth.

6-7. Jesus is forming a new kingdom, made up of people who are taking the good news of salvation to the whole world. Glory and power be to Him forever and ever. He will come back riding on the clouds of heaven. Everyone will see Him, including those who crucified Him. Those who have rejected Him will cry in terror. That's how it will be.

8. When I saw Jesus in vision, He said to me, "I am the Beginning and the End of all things. I always was, and I always

will be. I will come back for my people. I am Jesus, the All-powerful One."

9. I, John, your brother in Christ, was persecuted because I believe in Jesus. Then I was arrested and put on this rocky island of Patmos because I had told people the truth about Him.

10-11. One Sabbath, the day belonging to the Lord, I went to worship by the ocean. Suddenly the Holy Spirit came on me. I heard a voice behind me that sounded like a trumpet. It said, "Write down what you see and hear. Then send that book to the seven churches in the country of Asia."

12-13. I turned to see who was talking to me, and saw seven golden lampstands, with Jesus walking among them. He had on a long, white robe down to His feet, and a golden sash around His waist.

14-16. His hair was as white as snow and His eyes looked like flames of fire. His feet looked like glowing bronze. His voice sounded like a thundering waterfall. He held seven stars in His hand, and when He spoke, a beam of light like a sword came out of His mouth. His face looked as bright as the sun.

17-18. When I saw Him, I fell down at his feet as if I were dead. He touched

me and said, "Don't be afraid. I'm alive and will never die again. God has given Me full authority over heaven and earth. I have the keys of death and can unlock all graves.

19-20. "Write down what you see. Some things you'll see are happening now, and others are still in the future. The stars you saw in My hand represent My messengers. And the lampstands represent seven churches."

The Church in Ephesus

2 Jesus said, "Send this letter to the leader of the church in the city of Ephesus: 'Greetings from the One who walks among His people. **2-3.** "I know how hard you work for Me. I know of your steadfast endurance. I know how you can't stand wickedness. You have tested those who claim to believe but really don't. You've gone through many troubles for Me, and have not given up.

4-5. "However, you have lost the love you had for Me at first. Think back how much you loved Me, and you'll see what I mean. You need to put Me at the center of your lives again. If you don't, I will have to let the light of your church go out.

6. "But you have this in your favor: you hate the way some have abused the freedom of the gospel. They say that obedience doesn't matter. I, too, am very saddened by the way they twist the good news of the gospel.

7. "You have ears, so listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you. Those who keep Me at the center of their lives, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life that is in heaven."

The Church in Smyrna

8. Jesus continued, "Send this letter to the leader of the church in the city of Smyrna: 'Greetings from the One

who is the Beginning and the End, who was dead, but is alive.

9. "I know what you're going through for Me. But in God's sight you're precious. I know all about the names people call you, even those who claim to be believers when they're really not. The devil is using them to hurt you.

10. "Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Some of you will be put in prison. There will be a time of persecution, and many will be tested. But be faithful unto death, and I will restore your life, and will crown you with glory and honor.

11. "You have ears to hear, so listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you. Those who are faithful and are put to death will live again. They will not have to die the second death, which is forever."

The Church in Pergamum

12. Jesus then said, "Send this next letter to the leader of the church in Pergamum: 'Greetings from the One who, when He speaks, a beam of light like a sword comes out of His mouth.

13. "I know that you are in the city that Satan controls. But I also know that you have been faithful to Me in spite of persecution. My loyal disciple Antipas and others like him were killed there.

14-15. "But I need to point out a few things to you. Some in your church are talking as Balaam did. He suggested to the king of Moab that the Israelites be invited to join them in their pagan practices. Don't do that. Others in your church tell you that obedience isn't important. But that's not true.

16. "You're beginning to compromise. You need to repent, or I will have to use the sword of light from My mouth to fight against those who compromise the truth.

17. "Listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you. Those who refuse to compromise the truth, I will feed with spiritual bread from heaven. I will give to each of them the white stone of innocence, and a new name with a meaning only he and I will know."

The Church in Thyatira

18. Jesus continued, "Send this letter to the leader of the church in Thyatira: 'Greetings from the One whose eyes are like flames of fire, and whose feet are like glowing bronze.'

19. "I know of your love, your faithfulness, and your willingness to work for Me. I also know that you're working even harder for Me than you did before.

20-21. "But I need to point out some things to you. You excuse some in your church who act like Jezebel. She was the one who led Israel to go against what I said. I have given your people time to repent, but they refuse to change.

22-23. "They've been a bad example to their children, who also refuse to repent. So I will let them suffer the consequences. When this happens, they will know that I can read hearts and that they will be rewarded for what they have done.

24-28. "But some of you in Thyatira have remained faithful. Someday I will come back to share My throne with you. Then you will judge those who have listened to Satan. And the wicked will be destroyed. But you will shine like a morning star.

29. "You have ears, so listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you."

The Church in Sardis

3 Then Jesus said, "Send this letter to the leader of the church in the city of Sardis: 'Greetings from the

One who, with the Holy Spirit, is holding the seven stars in His hand. I know how hard you work. You think your faith is alive, but it's almost dead.

2-3. "Wake up then and strengthen your love for Me before it dies. You started out well. Remember how good you felt when you first gave your heart to Me, and how eager you were to obey? You need to continue to do that. If you don't wake up, My return will catch you by surprise.

4-5. "There are still some of you who love Me with all your hearts. One day you will walk beside Me in heaven. You will wear the white robe of My goodness. I will not take your name out of the book of life. Instead, I will introduce you to My Father and to all the holy angels.

6. "You have ears, so listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you."

The Church in Philadelphia

7. Jesus continued, "Send this letter to the leader of the church in Philadelphia: 'Greetings from the One who is true and holy and who has the key to heaven. No one else can open or close that door.

8. "I know everything you're doing for Me. I have opened the door of heaven for you, and no one can shut it. I know you're not very strong, but you have followed My teaching and are not ashamed of Me.

9. "Listen carefully. Some among you claim to be spiritual children of Abraham, but they are not. They're lying. One day they will see that you are Abraham's real spiritual children and that I love you.

10-11. "Since you have followed My teachings, I will remain close to you. A time of trouble will come upon the whole world. Those living at that time should not become discouraged, be-

cause I will come and save them. So hold on to your faith so that no one can come and take away your crown of life.

12. "The one who holds on and is faithful to Me will live in God's house and will never have to leave it. I will write on his heart the name of God, the name of New Jerusalem, and My new name.

13. "You have ears, so listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you."

The Church in Laodicea

14. "And to the leader of the church in the city of Laodicea write: 'Greetings from God's Faithful Witness, the power behind His creation.

15-17. "I know what you have done for Me, but your heart isn't in it. You're neither hot nor cold. You're like lukewarm water, so I am about to spit you out My mouth. You think you're spiritually rich, but actually you're poor, blind, and naked.

18. "You need to come to Me and buy the gold of faith so you'll be spiritually rich, the white robe of My goodness to cover your nakedness, and the ointment of the Holy Spirit so you can see.

19-20. "Those I love I also discipline. So repent and change your ways. I'm standing at the door of your heart, knocking. If you open the door, I'll come in and eat with you.

21. "Then, if you're faithful, you will sit with Me on My throne just as I was faithful and sat with My Father on His throne.

22. "You have ears, so listen to what the Holy Spirit is telling you."

God's Throne

4 In another vision I saw an open door into heaven. Suddenly I heard that same voice, as loud as a trumpet. Jesus said, "I want to show you what must take place after this."

2-3. Then the Holy Spirit took me through the door. I saw a throne with someone sitting on it, and I knew it was God. His face was too bright to look at. The light that came from Him looked like sparkling gems. A rainbow with a bright green cast stretched over the throne.

4. Around the throne were twenty-four elders seated on thrones. They were all dressed in white robes with golden crowns on their heads.

5. From God's throne came flashes of lightning and sounds of thunder. In front of His throne were seven burning lamps. I was told that they represented the Holy Spirit.

6. The floor of the throne room looked as smooth and clear as glass. Close to God's throne were four large angels.

7-8. The first one looked as kingly as a lion, the second as strong as an ox, the third as gentle as a human, and the fourth as sharp-eyed as an eagle. Each had six wings, and they sang, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. He always was, He is now, and He forever will be."

9-11. As these angels sang, the twenty-four elders knelt before God. They removed their crowns and laid them at His feet. Then they sang, "O Lord, our God, You are worthy to receive all glory, honor, and power because You created all things. You did this by Your own free will. And by Your great power everything continues to exist."

The Lamb and the Scroll

5 Then I saw God holding a scroll in His hand. It had writing on both sides and was sealed with seven seals. A powerful angel called out, "Who is worthy to come up and take the scroll and break the seals?" But no one was worthy to do it.

4-5. This discouraged me, and I began to cry. Then one of the elders said to me, "Stop crying. Look! Jesus, the one who was victorious over Satan, will open the scroll."

6-7. Then I saw a Lamb standing in front of God's throne. It was covered with blood, as if it had been killed. It had seven horns and seven eyes, which represented the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Then the Lamb went up to God, took the scroll, and prepared to open it.

8. When he opened the scroll, the four shining angels and the twenty-four elders fell on their knees and worshiped the Lamb, which represented Jesus. The twenty-four elders had harps and bowls of incense, which represented the prayers of God's people.

9-10. Then the elders stood and sang, "The Lamb is worthy to take the scroll. He was crucified for our sins and has brought us back to God. He has redeemed us out of every language, people, and nation. He has set up a kingdom of people who will rule the earth with Him forever."

11-12. Suddenly I heard what sounded like a million angels singing praises to the Lamb. God crowned Jesus as king of heaven and earth. As He did, the voices of the angels swelled into a thunderous chorus: "Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain. All power, wisdom, strength, honor, and glory belong to Him!"

13-14. Then voices seemed to come from every part of the universe in a final shout of praise: "To the One who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be praise, honor, glory, power, and strength forever and ever!" The four angels shouted, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell to their knees and worshiped Jesus, who lives forever and ever.

The Seven Seals

6 After the singing, Jesus broke the first seal and unrolled the scroll. The first angel said to me, "Come and see!" I looked to where he was pointing and saw a galloping white horse. Its rider had a bow in his hand. He was set on spreading the gospel and overcoming the enemies of God.

3-4. Jesus opened the second seal, and the second angel said to me, "Come and see!" I looked and saw a galloping red horse. Its rider had a sword in his hand. He waged war against God's people, who refused to compromise their faith just to have peace. People were killed. Even members of families turned against each other.

5-6. Jesus opened the third seal, and the third angel said to me, "Come and see!" I looked and saw a galloping black horse. Its rider had a balancing scale in his hand. As I was trying to understand this, the angel said, "While a drought will bring on a famine, it will not hurt the olives and grapes" (meaning those who love Jesus).

7-8. Then Jesus opened the fourth seal, and the fourth angel said to me, "Come and see!" I looked and saw a galloping pale horse. Its rider brought death with him wherever he went. Believers were dying from war, starvation, disease, and persecution.

9-10. Jesus opened the fifth seal, and I saw an altar. Below it were the bodies of those who had been killed for spreading the good news of the gospel. But their bodies were crying out, "Lord, we know how faithful and just You are. How much longer will You wait before judging those who killed us?"

11. A voice from heaven answered, "White robes and victory crowns are waiting for you. But you'll have to wait just a little longer until Satan finishes his work."

12-13. Jesus opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake. The sun became as dark as a black cloth. The full moon looked as red as blood. Stars fell from heaven like figs shaken off a tree by a strong wind.

14-17. Then, suddenly, the sky split open. Mountains sank and islands disappeared. Kings, world leaders, rich men, military officers, and many others hid in caves and behind rocks. They were afraid and called out, "Fall on us! Hide us! This is it! We'll never survive God's judgment!"

God's People

7 Then I saw what will happen just before Jesus returns. Four angels were holding back strong winds from four directions. They kept these winds of trouble from blowing too hard. Then another angel came flying from heaven having the seal of God in his hand. He called to the four angels, "Hold back those strong winds until I've sealed God's people."

4-8. I was told that there would be 144,000 from the harvest of God's people as samples of those who would be saved. Twelve thousand would represent each of the twelve spiritual tribes of Israel.

9. After that I saw a great crowd of people—too many to count. They came from every race, tribe, nationality, and language. All were dressed in white robes and held palm branches as a sign of victory.

10-12. They praised God and said, "Our salvation came from the One sitting on the throne, and from the Lamb." The four angels by the throne and the twenty-four elders fell on their knees and worshiped God, saying, "Praise, honor, wisdom, power, thanksgiving, and glory belong to God and to His Son forever and ever. Amen!"

13-14. One of the elders asked me, "Do you know who these people who are dressed in white robes are, or where they come from?" I answered, "No, sir, I don't." He replied, "These are the people who have come safely through the great tribulation of the last days. They gave their hearts to Jesus, and with His blood He made them clean."

15-17. "They will be with God and serve Him in His Temple forever. And God will make His home among them. Never again will they go hungry or suffer the heat of persecution. Jesus will be their Shepherd and will lead them to the springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Homecoming

8 Then Jesus opened the seventh seal, and for a short time there was silence in heaven. Heaven's inhabitants had gone to meet God's people and escort them home.

The Seven Trumpets

2-4. After that I had another vision. I saw God give seven angels each a trumpet. But before they blew them, I saw an angel come up to the golden altar before the throne. He had a golden bowl filled with incense, and poured it on the fire of the altar before the throne. The smoke of the burning incense represented the prayers of God's people.

5-6. Then the angel filled the incense bowl with some hot coals from the altar and threw them down to the earth. There was thunder, lightning, and a strong earthquake. This was the signal for the seven angels to begin to blow their trumpets.

7. The first angel blew his trumpet, and there was fire, hail, and blood. A

third part of the trees and all vegetation were burned up (meaning war over a third part of the world).

8-9. The second angel blew his trumpet, and what looked like a big mountain on fire was thrown into the sea. The sea looked like blood, and a third of the things in the sea died (meaning a third of the ships were destroyed).

10-11. The third angel blew his trumpet, and a huge star burning like a torch fell from heaven. It fell on a third of the rivers and springs of water, and they became bitter. Many people died from drinking that water.

12. The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third part of the sun, moon, and stars became dark (meaning one third of the rulers were gone). And there was no light for a third part of the day and night.

13. Then I saw an eagle soaring overhead, crying, "Trouble! Trouble! Trouble! There will be more trouble for the people on earth. It will begin with the blasts of the trumpets, the next three angels will blow."

The Trumpets Continue

9 The fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from heaven to the earth. I was told that it was Satan. He was given the key to open a pit, and out came billows of dark smoke. From the smoke came swarms of locusts that stung God's people. This continued for some time. And the stings were so painful that God's people longed to die, but couldn't.

7-12. These locusts grew so large that they looked like horses. Their riders were as fearless as lions. They wore a protective armor and charged into battle to advance their own kingdom. Their leader's name was Destroyer.

This ended the fifth trumpet and the first of the last three woes.

13-16. The sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from heaven saying to him, "Go quickly and tell the four angels holding back the Euphrates to let it go." As they did so, the river flooded a large part of the earth (meaning by an army with many, many riders on horses).

17-21. The next army I saw coming was terrible. Their horses and riders were afraid of nothing. Many people were killed. But other people continued to worship their idols, statues, and holy relics. They did not repent, but continued to lie, steal, and practice magic. This ended the sixth trumpet and the second of the last three woes.

The Little Scroll

10 Before the seventh angel blew his trumpet, I saw a powerful angel come down from heaven. I knew it was the Son of God, because He had a rainbow over His head, just as I had seen over God's throne. His face shone like the sun, and his legs looked like pillars of fire.

2-4. He held a small scroll open. He stood with His right foot on the sea and with His left foot on the land. He shouted with a loud voice that sounded like a lion roaring. Then there was thunder, and each thunder had a message. I started to write them down, but He told me not to, because it would not be good for God's people to know these messages ahead of time.

5-7. Then Jesus raised His right hand to heaven and made a promise in the name of God. He said that all time prophecies had ended, and that there would be no more long delay. Also, that the seventh angel would blow his trumpet, and the work of the gospel would come to an end.

8-10. Then a voice from heaven told me to take the little scroll that the Son of God had in His hand. So I went up to Jesus and asked Him if I could have it. He said, "Yes, take the scroll and feed on its message. When you do, it will taste sweet, but after you swallow it, it will be bitter in your stomach." When I ate it, that's what happened.

11. Then He said, "When God's people first learn about my soon coming, the message will be sweet to them. But before I come, they will have to take the message of the little scroll to the whole world, which will not be easy."

God's Two Witnesses

11 Jesus then gave me a measuring stick. He told me to measure God's people, who have the truth of the heavenly sanctuary. But I was not to measure those who had rejected the truth and had been trampling on it for a long time.

3-4. He said, "I will give power to My two witnesses, and they will speak for Me during that same time. But many will not listen." He seemed to be talking about God's word. They're like two lamps that get their oil from the two olive trees next to God in heaven.

5-6. If anyone tries to hurt God's word, he will be destroyed with the wicked. The word of God is so powerful that it can turn water into blood, as it did in Egypt. And God's word can stop the rain, as it did in the days of Elijah. It can also bring on plagues.

7-10. When people begin to understand God's word, the devil will become very angry. He will stir up people against the two witnesses. They will attack the witnesses, and leave them lying in the street as if they were dead. Then the people will be happy, but only for a short time.

11-12. The Holy Spirit will give life to the two witnesses, and they will stand up. Those who see them will be afraid. Then God will ask His two witnesses to come up high into the sky so that others can see them too.

13-14. Suddenly there will be a great earthquake. It will destroy part of the city and kill many people. The rest of the people will really be frightened and will give glory to God. This will prepare the way for the seventh trumpet and the third and final woe.

15. The seventh angel blew his trumpet. I heard voices coming from heaven, saying, "The time has come for the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdom of God's Son, and He will rule forever and ever."

16-17: Then the twenty-four elders bowed down on their faces and said, "We thank You, Lord our God. You always have been God and always will be. It's time for You to begin to rule the earth."

18. "The nations are angry. The time has come for You to judge the dead. It's time for You to reward Your people, and to destroy those who destroy the earth."

19. Then the Temple of God in heaven opened, and I saw the ark of His covenant in the Most Holy Place. There were flashes of lightning, noises, and crashes of thunder. An earthquake shook the whole world, and huge hailstones began falling everywhere. This ended the seventh trumpet and the third and final woe.

The Woman and the Dragon

12 Next I had a number of visions showing me the anger of the devil. I saw a beautiful woman in the sky, representing God's people. She was wrapped in sunlight, standing on the moon, and wearing a crown of twelve stars.

2-4. She was about to have a Baby. Then I saw a big red dragon with seven heads, seven crowns, and ten horns coming after her. The dragon was Satan, who had taken one third of the angels in heaven with him. I saw him watching the woman, planning to kill her Baby as soon as He was born.

5. The woman gave birth to a Son who would someday rule the world. God protected Him, and later took Him to heaven to sit next to Him on His throne.

6. Then the woman ran from the dragon and hid in the desert for a long time. But God protected her and cared for His people.

7-9. This war actually began in heaven long ago, when Lucifer challenged Jesus. So Jesus, also known as Michael, together with His angels, fought against the devil and his angels. Lucifer lost. He and his angels were cast out of heaven. Since then he has been trying to deceive the whole world.

10. Then the scene changed, and a voice from heaven declared, "Because of the cross, the kingdom of God has now been secured. Salvation is sure for those who believe. Satan, the accuser, has lost the sympathy of the heavenly angels forever.

11. "God's people will overcome him by their faith in Jesus and their testimony of what God has done for them. They love Jesus so much that they are willing to die for Him.

12. "So let all the angels in heaven rejoice! But the devil is still angry and will do all he can to hurt God's people, because he knows that he has only a short time."

13-14. When Satan realized that he would be restricted to this earth, he became angry at the woman. So she fled into the wilderness and had to

stay there a long time. But God took care of her.

15-16. When the dragon found out where she was, he and his people went after her like a flood. God came to her rescue so that Satan and his people could not destroy her.

17. Then the dragon got really angry at the woman and decided to attack the last of her children, those who keep God's commandments and hold on to what Jesus says.

The Animal From the Ocean

13 In the next vision I saw a beast come out of the sea. This beast looked like the dragon because it, too, had seven heads and ten horns; each horn had a crown on it. Its body was like that of a leopard, its paws like that of a bear, and each head looked like a lion's head with a big mouth. The dragon gave this beast great power and authority.

3-4. Then I saw that one of its heads had been badly wounded, but the wound had been healed. The beast walked all over the earth and charmed many people. Soon they began worshiping it, saying, "Who is as powerful and nice as this animal?" They didn't realize that the power of the dragon was behind it.

5-6. The beast claimed to speak for God. It was allowed to exercise its authority for some time. It insulted God and dishonored His name by undermining the truth about His sanctuary in heaven.

7-8. Then the dragon gave the beast even more power, and it began to persecute God's people. Soon it exercised its authority over people everywhere. Everyone worshiped the beast, except those whose names were written in God's book.

9-10. People have ears, so they

should listen to what I'm telling them. Those who take the sword against God's people will be killed. All this calls for steadfast endurance and faith by His people.

The Animal From the Land

11-12. Then I saw a large animal come up out of the earth. It had two little horns like a lamb, and at first it was innocent. But soon the lamblike animal came under the influence of the dragon and began to act that way. It copied the beast from the sea and exercised the same power, and made people worship the beast.

13-15. The dragon gave this animal power to perform great miracles, such as bringing fire down from heaven. So the animal fooled the people by the miracles that it did, and led them to honor the beast from the ocean.

16-17. The animal from the land forced people to show support for this plan by receiving a mark of identification. After that, no one could buy or sell, except those who had this mark.

18. To know what all this means takes more than human wisdom. It takes spiritual insight, because it's talking, not about an animal, but about the name and number of a man.

The Lamb of God

14 Then the scene changed back to heaven, and I saw the Lamb standing on a big mountain, surrounded by thousands and thousands who love Him. They had refused to receive the mark of the beast and the dragon, but had received the sign of loyalty to God.

2. I heard them sing, their voices blending together like a choir. It sounded like a mighty waterfall, accompanied by thunder and thousands of harps.

3. There were 144,000 of them. Together with the others who had come from the earth through the last days, they sang a new song. They sang it before God's throne, where the twenty-four elders and the four large angels were. It was a song of victory.

4-5. They had been loyal to Jesus and had followed Him wherever He led. They had not let go of God's truth. Now they were in heaven standing before Him. They were totally clean, as if they had never sinned.

Three Angels

6-7. Then the scene changed back to earth, and I saw an angel flying high in the sky. He was taking the gospel to every nation, tribe, and people. He had a special message, and called out with a loud voice, "Honor God and respect Him, for the time has come for His judgment to begin. Worship Him who created heaven and earth."

8. I saw a second angel flying behind the first one. He called out, "The spirit of Babylon is everywhere. People are confused by listening to the beast from the sea and the animal from the land."

9-11. Then I noticed a third angel flying behind the second one. He too had a message. He called out, "Those who honor the beast from the ocean and worship it, and have its identifying mark, will have to suffer the consequences. They will be destroyed by fire from the presence of God."

12. Those who keep God's commandments and have faith in Jesus will need to be strong. But God will help them.

13. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write down everything you saw and heard. Happy are those who die loving Jesus. They will rest for a little while, but God will not forget them or the good that they have done."

The Harvest

14. The scene changed, and I saw a white cloud coming down from heaven. As it came closer, it grew larger and larger. Jesus was sitting on that cloud wearing a golden crown. In His hand He held a sharp sickle.

15-16. Then an angel came out of the sanctuary in heaven and called to Jesus, "Your Father says to swing Your sickle, for the harvest is ready." So Jesus swung His sickle, which was the signal to the angels to reap the harvest.

17-18. The angel from the sanctuary also had a sharp sickle, and he led the other angels to begin harvesting. Then the angel in charge of the fire on the altar in front of God's throne called to this lead angel, "Separate the bunches of grapes, those who love Jesus from those who don't, because the harvest is now ready."

19-20. So the angel swung his sickle over the earth and gathered the bad grapes and turned them over to God for judgment. That's when the Holy Spirit withdrew from the earth, and things got worse and worse. Soon the earth looked like Babylon after it had been attacked by the Persians, when blood flowed in its streets.

The End

15 Again the scene changed, and I saw an amazing sight in heaven. God asked seven angels to take seven plagues down to earth.

2. I also saw what looked like a sea of glass. The water was smooth and clear, and below it I could see flames of fire. I saw those who had been loyal to Jesus and had not given in to the two animals. They were standing on the sea of glass, playing harps.

3-4. They sang this song of deliverance by the Lamb: "How great and

wonderful our God is! Just and true are His ways. He is the King of nations. Who will not love Him and respect Him? Who will not honor His name? All nations will kneel before Him when they see how just He is."

5-6. Then I saw that the heavenly sanctuary had been opened, signaling that Jesus' work in heaven was over. That's when the seven angels left heaven to take the seven last plagues to earth. They came out of the sanctuary dressed in white robes with golden belts around their waists.

7-8. Before they left, one of the four large angels standing next to God gave each of the seven angels a golden bowl filled with one of the plagues. Suddenly the throne room was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power. No one could go into the throne room until the plagues were over.

The Seven Last Plagues

16 Next I heard a voice from the throne say to the seven angels, "Go quickly and do the work you need to do. Empty the seven bowls with the plagues onto the earth."

2. So the first angel emptied his bowl onto the land, and the people who worshiped the two animals broke out with big sores all over their bodies.

3. The second angel followed and poured out his bowl onto the oceans. The water stopped moving and turned as red as blood. And all the fish died.

4-7. The third angel came next. He poured his bowl onto the springs and rivers, and they too turned as red as blood. I heard him say, "Lord, You have always been against sin. You are just in all You do. The wicked have killed Your people. They deserve to be

punished." Then I heard voices from heaven saying, "God is true and just."

8-9. The fourth angel followed and poured out his bowl into the rays of the sun. It became very hot, and made people feel as if their bodies were on fire. But the people still didn't change. They even cursed God for letting this happen to them.

10-11. The fifth angel quickly followed and poured out his bowl onto the home of the beast. That area became so dark that it hurt. People cursed God because of their pain and sores, but they refused to change.

12. The sixth angel followed and poured out his bowl onto the great river Euphrates, and immediately it dried up. This was the signal that Jesus would come and defeat the sea beast and the land animal, which were the leaders of spiritual Babylon.

13-14. Then I saw three evil spirits, like frogs, coming out of the mouth of the dragon, the sea beast, and the land animal. They were symbols of Satan's angels who went everywhere working miracles. They got all the rulers of the world to agree that God's people were responsible for all their troubles and should be killed. This was the final battle between God and the forces of evil.

15. Now listen to me. Jesus will rescue you as suddenly as a thief appears at night. So be alert, and continue to be loyal to God. He will cover your sins so that you won't have to be ashamed.

16. Then I saw the dragon and the kings and rulers set a date when they would kill God's people all over the world. This last battle between God and the dragon is called the battle of Armageddon.

17-18. The seventh angel quickly followed and poured out his bowl into the sky. Then God spoke from the

sanctuary in heaven, saying, "It's finished!" There was lightning, thunder, and a more violent earthquake than has ever shaken the world.

19. The war of the dragon and the two animals against God ended. Spiritual Babylon that they had put together split into three parts. God had not forgotten what they had done to His people, and He carried out His justice against the three of them.

20-21. The great earthquake hit with such force that entire islands disappeared and mountains dropped out of sight. Then came a terrible hailstorm. Each hailstone weighed about 100 pounds. But the people who survived all this cursed God and still would not change, even though the earth looked like a big wilderness.

The Evil Woman

17 One of the seven angels with the seven bowls said to me, "Come, let me show what will happen before the end comes, so that you'll understand God's justice. The beast from the ocean will use all its charm to deceive people, like a beautiful woman sitting on the beach. People who pass by can't stop looking at her."

3. Then the Holy Spirit showed me another side of this beautiful woman. I saw her sitting on a big red animal with seven heads and ten horns, just like the dragon and the beast from the sea. But this animal's horns didn't have crowns.

4. The woman was dressed in a purple robe and looked like a queen. She wore jewelry of diamonds and pearls to attract attention. She was holding a golden cup filled with lies and deceit.

5-6. A name was written on her forehead. It read "The Queen of Babylon, Mother of False Worship." She seemed to be drunk with power from killing

God's people who were loyal to Jesus.

7-8. Then the angel said, "Why are you so shocked? Let me tell you more about this woman and the animal she's riding. The animal represents the political power the woman had. She lost it, but got it back. After that happened, everyone not loyal to Jesus and whose names were not written in the books of heaven began to worship the woman.

9-10. To understand this, you need some help. The seven heads represent seven mountains where the woman lives. They also represent seven great kingdoms. In the past, five have persecuted God's people, but are gone. One will continue to persecute. The other will do so, but for only a little while.

11. The power behind these seven kingdoms is an eighth kingdom, and in that sense can be counted in with the seven. But it too will come to its end.

12-14. The ten horns represent all the kings and rulers of the earth. They will unite and support the political power of the animal, but just for a little while. They will fight against the Lamb. But the Lamb and His faithful followers will defeat them, for He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

15-16. Then the angel pointed back to the water where the woman was sitting and said, "The waters that you see represent people from all over the world. The ten horns are the kings and rulers of the world who will support the woman. But finally they will turn against her.

17-18. God will let this happen until the prophecies about her are fulfilled. The woman represents the influence spiritual Babylon will have over kings and rulers."

Spiritual Babylon

18 Next I saw a powerful angel coming down from heaven with great authority. His

glory lit up the whole world. He had God's final message for everyone.

2-3. I heard him call out with a very loud voice, "The kind of world that the nations have built is like a big city filled with wickedness. Many businessmen and merchants have become rich because of her."

4-7. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to the people, "Come out of this city of Babylon so you won't share in her sins and be punished with her plagues. God remembers her wickedness. He will treat her as she treated others. This city thinks that she's the queen of the world. Because she's so rich, she feels that she will never be poor.

8-10. "But in a very short time, all that she has will be taken away. Disease, death, and famine will be everywhere. Fire will destroy everything on its way through the city. Store owners and businessmen will cry when they see what has happened. They will say, 'Oh, no! Not our world city that we worked so hard to build. All her wealth is now gone!

11-16. "'Now there's no money for people to buy what we have to sell.' Businessmen will say, 'That great world city with all her riches is gone! And in such a short time!'

17-19. "When the captains and sailors see the city going up in smoke, they will say, 'There was no city like this world city! How tragic! We got rich by shipping her goods, but now the city is gone! Totally destroyed!'

20. Then the angel said in a loud voice, "Let all of heaven and God's people on earth rejoice. For the great world city has been treated just as it treated you."

21. Next I saw a powerful angel pick up a huge boulder. With great force he threw it into the ocean. And it was

gone. He said to me, "That great world city, spiritual Babylon, will be thrown down just as forcefully. It will disappear just as this huge boulder did."

22-23. Then he looked at the world city and said, "Your music will cease. The work of your craftsmen will end. Your production lines will stand still. Your streets will be without light at night. You'll never hear the happy voices of bridegrooms and brides again. Your businessmen deceived people."

24. "You will never deceive people again. You will be destroyed, because the blood of God's people has been found in you."

The Coming of Jesus

19 After this I heard a shout of many voices coming from heaven saying, "Alleluia! Glory, honor, and power belong to God!"

2-3. "His decisions are true and right. He has pronounced the death sentence against the woman. He has let her taste her own violence against His people." Again they shouted, "Alleluia! Let the world city go up in smoke and be gone forever!"

4-5. The twenty-four elders and the four large angels bowed down before God and the Lamb and said, "Amen! Alleluia!" Then a voice from heaven said, "Let's praise our God, all you who serve and honor Him, both small and great."

6-8. Next I heard many voices. They sounded like a great waterfall, saying, "Alleluia! The Lord God reigns! Let's rejoice, because it's time for Jesus to get His bride and bring her home. She's ready and waiting for Him. She's wearing the fine linen gown that Jesus gave her, and she has kept it bright and clean."

9. My angel said, "Write this: Those who have been invited to Jesus' wed-

ding and have accepted the Father's invitation are happy!" Then he added, "The things that I've told you about God and His Son are true."

10. When I saw and heard all this, I bowed down at the angel's feet to thank him. But he pulled me up and said, "Don't worship me; worship God! I'm one of His servants, just as you are. I too am loyal to the testimony of Jesus, which is the spirit of prophecy."

11-12. Then I saw heaven open. There was Jesus on a white horse galloping toward the earth. He is also called "Faithful and True." He was on His way to make war. His eyes were like flames of fire, and He wore many crowns.

13. His robe was the color of blood. He is also called "The Living Word of God." He was ready to fulfill the promise to His people to come back and destroy their enemies.

14-16. A whole army of angels followed Him. They were all dressed in white robes, riding on white horses. Out of Jesus' mouth came a beam of light that looked like a sword. He will protect His people as a shepherd protects his sheep. He will carry out the judgment of God and defeat His enemies. On His robe is written: "King of kings and Lord of lords."

17-18. Then I saw an angel in the sky standing in the blinding light of the sun. He shouted to the animals and birds, "Come! Soon you will be eating the dead bodies of God's enemies."

19-21. Then the red animal on which the woman sat urged the nations of the world to fight against Jesus. But the sea beast and the land animal that had turned false prophet were both captured. They were thrown into a lake of fire and destroyed. The rest of God's enemies were destroyed by the sword of light from Jesus' mouth.

Satan Captured

20 After this I saw a powerful angel come down from heaven with a key and a huge chain in his hand representing God's power. He took hold of Satan, that old dragon, the devil, and chained him to this earth for 1,000 years.

3. It was like throwing him into a pit without a bottom. He couldn't get out until the 1,000 years were over. That's when the wicked will be raised from the dead. It's called the second resurrection. When that happens, Satan will be free to control them again, but only for a little while.

4. Then the scene changed back, and I saw God's people in heaven. They were sitting on thrones helping Jesus judge the wicked. Some of them had been killed for their loyalty to God's Word. Others had refused to worship the two animals.

5-6. The wicked stayed dead for 1,000 years. Those faithful to God had been raised in the first resurrection when Jesus had returned. They will never die. During the 1,000 years they will help God and Jesus with the special work of judging the wicked.

7-8. At the end of the 1,000 years the wicked will be raised, and Satan will be set free. When he sees millions of wicked people alive again, he will go into action. The New Jerusalem will come down from heaven with God's people. Then Satan will persuade the wicked to attack the city.

9-10. Just as they surround it, fire will come down from heaven. All of them will be destroyed, including Satan and his angels. This is called the second death. That death will last forever.

11. Just before that happened, I saw God sitting on a great white throne. His face was so bright that everything

around Him seemed to disappear.

12-13. All the wicked stood in front of Him, including Satan and his angels. The Book of Life and the Book of Death were opened. Now the wicked could see what they had done. All of the wicked were present, even those who had been buried at sea.

14-15. That's when I saw Satan, together with all those whose names were not written in the Book of Life, thrown into the lake of fire and totally destroyed. This is called the second death.

A New Heaven and Earth

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The old earth with all its pollution was gone, and so were the large oceans. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, looking as beautiful as a bride at her wedding.

3-4. I heard a voice from heaven that said, "God will make His home on earth and live with His people. He will wipe away their tears, and there will be no more death, sadness, crying, or pain. Such things will be gone forever."

5. Then Jesus said to me, "Look! I have made everything new. So write down what you see and what I'm telling you. My words are dependable and true."

6-7. "Salvation is now finished. Evil is gone. I am the A and the Z, the Beginning and the End. I will give My people the water of life free. They will inherit the earth. God will be their Father, and they will be His sons and daughters."

8. "But those who didn't listen to Me, and kept on lying, cheating, killing, being impure, playing around with demons or magic, and worshiping idols, will be destroyed. They will suffer the consequences of what they have done, and will never live again."

New Jerusalem

9. Then one of the seven angels who had helped with the seven last plagues said to me, "Come, let's take a closer look at God's city, the bride of Jesus."

10-11. In a vision the Holy Spirit took me to the top of a very high mountain and showed me the holy city. The glory of God's presence made the city sparkle like a huge jasper stone. It had settled where old Jerusalem once stood.

12-14. The city was surrounded by a massive wall with twelve gates. An angel gatekeeper stood at each gate. Above each gate was engraved the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The city rested on twelve foundations. Each one had a name of one of the twelve apostles on it.

15-18. Then the angel gave me a golden measuring rod with which to measure the city. The city was a perfect square. Each side was 1,500 miles long, surrounded by a big wall. The city was made of gold, but was clear as glass. The wall was made of jasper, a deep-green precious stone.

19-21. Each of the foundations was made of a different precious stone. Their colors were deep-green, light-blue, white, bright-green, pink, deep-red, yellow, deep-blue, pale-blue, gold, light-red, and purple. Each gate that led into the city was made of one huge pearl. The streets were made of gold, clear as glass.

22-23. I didn't see the Temple in the city. It really didn't need one, because God and Jesus were there. The Temple was located outside the city as a reminder of what God had done for His people. The glory shining from God and Jesus made the light of the sun and moon unnecessary.

24-26. This city was built for God's people. Every nation was represented,

and each brought its own honor and glory to the praise of God. The gates of the city will never need to be locked, because there's no night there.

27. The greatness of the city will be the redeemed people. No one who does shameful things or tells lies will be there. Only those whose names are written in the Book of Life will enter the city.

A Tour of the City

22 Then the angel gave me a tour of the city. He took me to the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God through the city. It was as clear as crystal. In the center of the city stood the tree of life. Its trunk made a great arch over the river. The tree produced twelve different kinds of fruit, one kind each month. The fruit and the leaves were full of life.

34. There will be no more sin. The only reminder of it will be the scars on the hands and feet of Jesus. His people will be grateful and love and serve Him forever. They will also see God the Father, and will look into His face of love like little children. All will have His name, because they are part of His royal family.

5. It never gets dark there, because the city is lighted by the presence of God and Jesus. His people will help rule God's universe forever and ever.

The Coming of Jesus

6. Then the angel said, "What you saw and what I have told you are true. The Holy Spirit will help you write what you saw and heard, just as He did the prophets of old."

7. Jesus said, "When I come, I will come quickly. Happy and blessed are those who are loyal to the prophecies of this book."

8-9. I am John, your brother in the faith. After seeing and hearing all these things, I was so overwhelmed that I fell on my knees in worship. The angel said, "Don't do that. I'm a servant of God, just as you and all the prophets have been. Blessed are those who obey what you have written. Worship God, not me."

10-11. He added, "Now, don't keep this book a secret, because God's people need to know what's coming, especially those living in the last days. Just before Jesus comes, probation will end. That's when He will say, 'The wicked will remain so, because that's what they want to do. And those who do what's right will never change.'"

12-13. Then Jesus said, "Now listen! When I come, I will come quickly. I will bring rewards with Me and give one to everyone, depending on how they lived. I am the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

14-15. "Those who love Me and have lived by My commandments will be blessed. They have a right to eat of the tree of life, so they will enter the gates of the city. But outside the city are those who practiced magic, who murdered, were immoral, worshiped

idols, and loved lies and told them."

16. He also said, "I have shown you and have told you all these things through My angel Gabriel. So write them down and send them to all the churches. I am a descendant of David, and I am God's bright and morning star."

The Invitation

17. The Holy Spirit and the beautiful city are inviting you to come. Those who read this book and understand the prophecies are also inviting you to come. Let everyone who is thirsty come and drink of the life-giving water that's in this book.

18-19. I, John, the apostle, warn everyone who reads this book not to change these prophecies. If they do, the plagues of this book will fall on them. If anyone dismisses part of this book with its prophecies as not being important, God will take away his right to the city and to the tree of life I have written about.

20-21. Jesus says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Yes, do come quickly, Jesus. May the grace of Jesus, our Savior and Lord, be with all of you. Amen.